

The Truth of God: Part I

My Response to Pastor Gino Jennings, Rev. Fred Price, etc.

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1. Introduction

The God of normative Jewish, Christian and Islamic tradition is wholly spiritual,¹ commonly described as “a perfect, pure spirit,”² “a nonembodied mind”³. According to this tradition, God’s spirituality, affirmed in Isaiah 31:3 and John 4:24 (“God is Spirit”), necessarily implies that he is immaterial⁴ and formless⁵. But as is well-known now, such an understanding of spirituality and of the divine is thoroughly Hellenistic; that is to say, it is Greek philosophic tradition that bequeathed to the world, and to the monotheistic religions in particular, this divine, immaterial and formless spirit.⁶ The very notion of immateriality is the brainchild of Plato.⁷ Semitic tradition, however, even Semitic revelatory tradition (i.e. the “Religions of the Book”) possessed no such understanding prior to contact with Hellens or carriers of Hellenistic culture.⁸ The

¹ See Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz, *The Divine Attributes* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) 12: “Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have traditionally maintained that God is a spiritual thing that exists outside the realm of divinely created physical things. Thus, these three religions are forms of *psychotheism*, the belief in a wholly spiritual God or gods.”

² P. Heinisch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1940), 29; H.H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 75f.

³ See C. Glenn Kenadjan, “Is the Doctrine That God is Spirit an Incoherent Concept?” *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society* (hereafter *JETS*) 31 (1988): 191: “According to Scriptures and to traditional Christian theology, God is conceived of as thinking and acting spirit, completely lacking any material components whatever. In essence this means that God is a nonembodied mind.”

⁴ See for example Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994) 66: “The idea of spirituality of necessity excludes the ascription of anything like corporeity to God... By ascribing spirituality to God, we also affirm that He has none of the properties belonging to matter, and that He cannot be discerned by bodily senses.” See also Sam Whittemore Fowler, “The Visual Anthropomorphic Revelation of God,” PhD. Dissertation. Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978, 53: “The very essence of spirit is immateriality and invisibility.” Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 99, describing God as an ‘Omnipresent Spirit,’ notes: “That God is a person, yet one without a body, seems the most elementary claim of theism.”

⁵ Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Goddess* (New York: Ktav, 1967) 21 notes that the God of the Jews, “being pure spirit... is without body, he possesses no physical attributes and hence no sexual traits. To say that God is either male or female is therefore completely impossible from the viewpoint of traditional Judaism.” The concept of God as a spirit is not universal in Islam because for many *ruh* (spirit) is created. Thus, as D.B. Macdonald (“The Development of the Idea of Spirit in Islam,” *Acta Orientalia* 11 [1931]: 328) remarks concerning “the belief of the great majority of Muslims down to the present time”: “... *Allāhu ruh*, which for us means ‘God is a spirit,’ and which seems to us the simplest and most intelligible statement about God, is for them a most horrible blasphemy.” Macdonald is here specifically referring to the views of Wahhābī Islam, and points out that it is possible for some Persian Muslims to refer to God as *al-ruh al-‘zam*, “The Great Spirit” and *ruh kullī*, the “Universal Spirit.” See also idem, “From the Arabian Nights to Spirit,” *Muslim World* (hereafter *MW*) 9 (1919): 336-348. Henri Masse (*Islam* [Beirut: Khayat Books and Publishing, 1966] 206) observes also that “the Mutazelite considered Allah to be Pure Spirit.” Whether one was willing to characterize God as “spirit” or not, there is agreement between Jews, Christians and Muslims that he is immutable without figure, form, colour or parts. He is not a body composed of substances or elements. He is not an accident inherent in a body nor does He dwell in any particular place.” Muhammad Ibrahim H.I. Surty, “The Concept of God in Muslim Tradition,” *Islamic Quarterly* 37 (1993): 127f. On the idea of spirit in Islam see also Louis Massignon, “The Idea of Spirit in Islam,” in *The Mystic Vision. Papers from the Eranos Yearbook* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) 319-323.

⁶ R. Renehan, “On the Greek Origins of the Concepts of Incorporeality and Immateriality,” in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 21 (190): 105-138. On the Greek origin of the divine spirit see also below.

⁷ Renehan, “On the Greek Origins” 105, 138. See below.

⁸ A. Dudley, “Old Testament Anthropomorphism,” *Milla wa-Milla* 13 (1973): 15-19; F.E. Peters, “Hellenism and the Near East,” *Biblical Archaeologist* Winter (1983): 33-39. Daniel Boyarin, “The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic,” *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 553 argues that “only under Hellenic influence do Jewish cultures exhibit any anxiety about the corporeality or visibility of God; the biblical and Rabbinic religions were quite free of such influences and anxieties (emphasis original).” See also Gedaliahu Stroumsa, “The Incorporeality of God: Context and Implication of Origen’s Position,” *Religion* 13 (1983): 345-358; Harry A. Wolfson, “Maimonides of the Unity and Incorporeality of God,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* (hereafter *JQR*) 56 (1965): 112-136. Maurice Wiles, *The Christian Fathers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966) 13, 17, notes also: “the image of God with which the (Church) Fathers worked was not drawn exclusively, or even primarily, from Scripture. Its primary source was the Graeco-Roman world to which they belonged and to which they were concerned to speak... God, declares the first article of the Church of England (Thirty-nine Articles) is ‘without body, parts or passions.’ It is not the sort of description of God which arises naturally or spontaneously from the Bible taken by itself. It comes straight from this Platonic tradition which the Fathers shared with

ancient Near Eastern (ANE) and Semitic 'God of Religion' was always anthropomorphic (Greek, *anthropos*='man', *morphē*='form'); that is to say he/they possessed human form.⁹ While representation of the divine in animal form (theriomorphism, Greek *therion*, 'animal' and *morphē* 'form') is met with in all periods of religious history in the ANE, it is not the case that anthropomorphism succeeded an earlier theriomorphism.¹⁰ The gods of the ANE were transcendently anthropomorphic: they possessed bodies human in form, but supreme in holiness, substance, and sublimity.¹¹ The theriomorphs were so-called 'attribute animals', meaning they represented particular characteristics of the otherwise anthropomorphic deities.¹²

This is true as well of the God of the scriptures, Bible and Qur'ān. Israel stood in linguistic, cultural and religious continuity with her neighbors in the Levant.¹³ And as Morton Smith pointed out in a classic article, Israel participated in "the common theology of the ancient Near East."¹⁴ This means that the god(s) of Israel and the gods of the ANE actually differed less than has been supposed.¹⁵ Like the gods of the ANE,

the most thoughtful of their pagan contemporaries." See also Robert P. Casey, "Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Platonism," *Harvard Theological Review* (hereafter *HTR*) 18 (1925): 39-101; G. Jantzen, *God's World, God's Body* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 23-35. On Islam see Morris S. Seal, *Muslim Theology: A Study of Origins with Reference to the Church Fathers* (London: Luzac and Company Limited, 1964); R.M. Frank, "The Neoplatonism of Ḡāhm Ibn Ṣafwān," *Museon* 78 (1965): 395-424; idem, "The Divine Attributes According to the Teachings of Abu L-Hudhayl Al-'Allāf," *Museon* 82 (1969): 451-506; Daud Rahbar, "Relation of Muslim Theology to the Qur'an," *MW* 51 (1961): 44-49. On the early orthodox rejection of Greek scientific works thought to be "contaminated" by theological error see Ignaz Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam Toward the 'Ancient Sciences,'" in Merlin L. Swartz (ed.), *Studies on Islam* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 185-215.

⁹ On the anthropomorphic deities of the ANE see now Esther J. Hamori, "When Gods Were Men': Biblical Theophany and Anthropomorphic Realism," Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 2004, 191-235 and further: Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: the 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1993) 3-39; Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (1992) 85-98; Maryo Christina Annette Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990), but on Korpel's forced attempt to impute metaphoric intentions to the Canaanites see the review by Marvin H. Pope in *Ugarit-Forschungen* (hereafter *UF*) 22 (1990): 497-502; Marvin H. Pope and Jeffrey H. Tigay, "A Description of Baal," *UF* 3 (1971): 117-129; James B. Pritchard, "The Gods and their Symbols," in idem, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures, Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 160-85.

¹⁰ Already in 1939 Johannes Hemple ("Die Grenzen des Anthropomorphismus Jahwes im Alten Testament," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (hereafter *ZAW*) 16 [1939] 75) was able to dismiss this 'naïve entwicklungsgeschichtlichen Auffassung...', daß etwa regelmäßiger Theriomorphismus dem Anthropomorphismus habe vorausgehen müssen" ("naïve evolutionary view... that for instance theriomorphism must have preceded anthropomorphism." In fact, "kein Aufeinanderfolge des Therio- und Anthropomorphismus klar nachweisbar ist" ("no 'following-of-each-other' of theriomorphism and anthropomorphism is clearly demonstrable"). Henri Frankfort has pointed out that such a theory of "Stufenfolge" ("sequence of stages") "ignores the fact that the earliest divine statutes which have been preserved represent the god Min in human shape. Conversely, we find to the very end of Egypt's independence that gods were believed to be manifest in animals." *Ancient Egyptian Religion: an interpretation* (1948; New York: Harper & Row, 1961) 11. For a balanced statement of the situation in Pre-dynastic Egypt, see Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche (edd.), *Gods and Men in Egypt: 3,000 BCE to 395 CE* (trans. from the French by David Lorton; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) 16-22; David P. Silverman, "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt," in Byron E. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 7-87, esp. 9-30.

¹¹ On transcendent anthropomorphism in ANE and Classical (Greek) tradition see Ronald S. Hendel, "Aniconism and Anthropomorphism in Ancient Israel," in Karel van der Toorn (ed.), *The Image and the Book. Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (CBET 21; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1997) 206-228; Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Dimbody, Dazzling Body," in Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (edd.), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body: Part One* (New York: Zone, 1989) 19-47.

¹² On the attribute animal in Egyptian religion see especially Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: the One and the Many* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) 109-25.

¹³ Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2002) 19-31; Michael David Coogan, "Canaanite Origins and Lineage: Reflections on the Religion of Ancient Israel," in Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (edd.), *Ancient Israelite religion: essays in honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 115-124; John Day, "Ugarit and the Bible: Do They Presuppose the Same Canaanite Mythology and Religion?" in George J. Brooke, Adrian H.W. Curtis and John F. Healey (edd.), *Ugarit and the Bible: proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible, Manchester, September 1992* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994) 35-52.

¹⁴ "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952): 135-147.

¹⁵ Bernhard Lang, *The Hebrew God: Portrait of an Ancient Deity* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2002); Nicholas Wyatt, "Degrees of Divinity: Some mythical and ritual aspects of West Semitic kingship," *UF* 31 (1999): 853-87; Edward L. Greenstein, "The God of Israel and the Gods of Canaan: How Different were they?" *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, July 29-August 5, 1997*, Division A (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1999) 47-58; J.J.M. Roberts, "Divine Freedom and Cultic Manipulation in Israel and Mesopotamia," in idem, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 72-85; Edward L. Greenstein, "The God of Israel and the Gods of Canaan: How Different were they?" *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, July 29-August 5, 1997*, Division A (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1999) 47-58.

the god(s) of Israel and biblical tradition was anthropomorphic.¹⁶ The single most important effect of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim intercourse in Late Antiquity with Greek philosophic tradition was the total eclipsing of the anthropomorphic God of Religion by the formless God of Philosophy. In all three religions, the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad was supplanted by the God of Xenophanes, Plato, Aristotle and Cleanthes.

This is the historical backdrop against which we must view the ongoing dispute, if you will, between Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam on the one hand, and Christian and orthodox Muslim theologians on the other, regarding the question, Who is God? Elijah Muhammad, very boldly and unapologetically condemned this “ignorant belief” that God is “a formless something”¹⁷ and declared in fact that “God is a man, and we just can’t make Him other than a man.”¹⁸ A Black Man, to be more precise. God, the Creator of heaven and earth, was/is a divine black man. Such an assertion predictably spawned innumerable polemics from both quarters. The Board of Ulema of the Italian Muslim Association,

¹⁶ On biblical anthropomorphism and an anthropomorphic deity v. Kempel, “Grenzen des Anthropomorphismus Jahwes”; Frank Michaeli, *Dieu et l’Image de l’Homme. Etude de la notion anthropomorphique de Dieu dans l’Ancien Testament* (Neuchâtel-Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1950); James Barr, “Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplemental Volume* (hereafter *VTSup*) 7 (1959): 31-38; E. LaB. Cherbonnier, “The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism,” *HTR* 55 (1962): 187-208; idem, “In Defense of Anthropomorphism,” in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels. Papers delivered at the Religious Studies Center Symposium*, Brigham Young University, March 10-11, 1978, 155-173; Benjamin Uffenheimer, “Myth and Reality in Ancient Israel,” in S.N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986) (=“Biblical Theology and Monotheistic Myth,” *Immanuel* 14 [1982]: 7-25); Meir Bar-Ilan, “The Hand of God: A Chapter in Rabbinic Anthropomorphism,” in *Rashi, 1040-1990. Hommage à Ephraïm E. Urbach*, ed. Gabrielle Sed-Rajna (Paris: Patrimoine, 1993) 321-335; Jacob Neusner, “Conversation in Nauvoo about the Corporeality of God,” *BYU Studies* 36 (1996-97): 7-30; Stephen Moore, “Gigantic God: Yahweh’s Body,” *Journal for the Study of the Testament* (hereafter *JSOT*) 70 (1996): 87-115; idem, *God’s Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Ronald S. Hendel, “Aniconism and Anthropomorphism in Ancient Israel,” in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Karel van der Toorn (CBET 21; Leuven: Peeters, 1997) 205-228; Rimmon-Kasher, “Anthropomorphism, Holiness and the Cult: A New Look at Ezekiel 40-48,” *ZAW* 110 (1998): 192-208; Karel van der Toorn, “God (1) אֱלֹהִים,” in Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, Pieter W. van der Horst (edd.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (2nd ed.; Leiden; Boston: Brill; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999) 361-365; J. Andrew Dearman, “Theophany, Anthropomorphism, and the Imago Dei: Some Observations about the Incarnation in the Light of the Old Testament,” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O’Collins (edd.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 31-46; James L. Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2003) 5-107; Hamori, “When Gods Were Men: On early Christian anthropomorphism see A. McGriffert, *The God of the Early Christians* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1924); David L. Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity,” *HTR* 83:2 (1990): 105-116; idem, “Reply to Kim Paffenroth’s Comment,” *HTR* 86:2 (1993): 235-239; idem, “The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives,” *BYU Studies* 35 (1995-96): 7-95; Roland J. Teske, S.J., “The Aim of Augustine’s Proof that God truly Is,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1986): 253-268; Carl W. Griffin and David L. Paulsen, “Augustine and the Corporeality of God,” *HTR* 95 (2002): 97-118; Gilles Quispel, “The Discussion of Judaic Christianity,” in idem, *Gnostic Studies II* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1975) 146-158; idem, “Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis,” *Vigiliae Christianae* (hereafter *VC*) 34 (1980): 1-13; Jarl Fossum, “Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism,” *VC* 37 (1983): 260-287; Alexander Colitzin, “The Demons Suggest an Illusion of God’s Glory in a Form: Controversy Over the Divine Body and Vision of Glory in Some Late Fourth, Early Fifth Century Monastic Literature,” *Studia Monastica* 44 (2002): 13-42; idem, “The Vision of God and the Form of Glory: More Reflections on the Anthropomorphic Controversy of AD 399,” in John Beahr, Andrew Louth and Dimitri Conomos (edd.), *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West. Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) 273-297. On Anthropomorphism in early Islam see Richard C. Martin, *The Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) s.v. “Anthropomorphism,” 1:103-107; Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (hereafter *TG*), 6 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), particularly vol. 4.; idem, “Tashbīh wa-Tanzīh,” *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New Edition; Leiden: Brill, 1954-) 10:341-344; idem, “The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam,” The University Lecture in Religion at Arizona State University, March 3, 1988 (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1988); Daniel Gimaret, *Dieu et l’image de l’homme: les anthropomorphismes de l’Islam et leur interprétation par les théologiens* (Paris: Patrimoine, 1997); Claude Gilliot, “Muqātil, Grand Exégète, Traditionniste Et Théologien Maudit,” *Journal Asiatique* 179 (1991): 39-84; Montgomery Watt, “Some Muslim Discussions of Anthropomorphism” in idem, *Early Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 86-93; Georges C. Anawati, “Attributes of God: Islamic Concepts” in *Encyclopedia of Religion* 1:513-519; A. Al-Azmeh, “Orthodoxy and Hanbalite Fideism,” *Arabica* 35 (1988): 253-266; Robert M. Haddad, “Iconoclasts and Mu’tazila: The Politics of Anthropomorphism,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (Summer-Fall 1982): 287-305; W. Madelung, “The Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran,” in idem, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*. London: Variorum Reprints, 1985. V; Kees Wagtendonk, “Images in Islam: Discussion of a Paradox,” in Dirk van Der Plas (ed.), *Effigies Dei*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987. 112-129; Wesley Williams, “Aspects of the Creed of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal: A Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic Discourse,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (hereafter *IJMES*) 34 (2002): 441-463; Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī’s Kitāb Akhbār al-ʿArab- Šifāt, a Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with Translation, Introduction and Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

¹⁷ *Muhammad Speaks*, November 24, 1972 cited Zafar I. Ansari, “Aspects of Black Muslim Theology,” *Studia Islamica* 53 (1981) 147.

¹⁸ Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Black Man* (Newport News: United Brothers Communications Systems, 1965), p.6.

for instance, issued a *fatwa* in March of 1998 against the Nation of Islam and its leader, Louis Farrakhan which read in part:

Regarding the "Nation of Islam", their official doctrine is that Allah appeared in the form of a human being named Fareed [sic] Muhammad, and that this "incarnation of God" chose another man, called Elijah Muhammad, as his Prophet. This is a clear contradiction of the Monotheistic faith (*Tawhid*), and of the Koranic teaching according to which Mohammad (blessings and peace upon him) is the Seal of the Prophets. That is enough to say that everyone who belongs to the "Nation of Islam" is not, *ipso facto*, a Muslim, but an unbeliever.

Muslims must declare this truth, and each one of them who keeps silent while listening to Mr. Farrakhan being called "a Muslim leader" is sinning. Since the matter concerns "faith and unbelief," it is not permitted to avoid a judgment due to political or diplomatic considerations. Every marriage between a Muslim and a member of the "Nation of Islam" is null and void, and whoever, after becoming a member of this organization, wants to return to Islam, must repent and be re-converted. In case he was married, he must re-celebrate his wedding; in case he performed the Pilgrimage, he must perform it again.

No less condemning have been Christian polemics. Pastor Gino Jennings of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in a televised 'debate' with mainly NOI sympathizers and one-time-members, declared that Elijah Muhammad's teaching on God is a 'lie' that contradicts scripture:

We do not believe God is a man. We do not believe God is flesh or blood...God is a spirit and not a man...If any messenger says a revelation came to him about God, that messenger's message must accord with scripture...If I teach something about God that is not true and it contradicts the scripture, you are justified in saying I am a lie.¹⁹

And Rev. Frederick Price, pastor of the Crenshaw Christian Center in California, mockingly argues in his book, ***Race, Religion, and Racism***²⁰:

Elijah Muhammad says that 'the Father is also a man.' Look closely at what (he) says: "Allah is God. The coming of the Son of Man-the Infidels are Angry: Who is His father if God in not His father? God is His father, but the father is also a man..." Note that (he) did not say that Allah manifested himself in the 'form of a man.' Elijah Muhammad said, "...the Father is also a man..." That's different than saying someone manifested himself in the form of a man.

What does the Bible say? In Numbers 23:19, it is written:

"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

Just the first part of the verse is the key part: 'God is not a man, that He should lie...' Yet, we have Elijah Muhammad, who came after the Bible, saying 'the father is also a man...' The Bible says, 'God is not a man...'²¹

If Allah gave Mr. Muhammad this, and Allah is the same as Jehova God, and Jehova God is the author of the Bible, then Jehova and Allah are both confused.²²

Whether outright condemning or attempting to make mockery the message is the same: Elijah Muhammad's teaching on God contradicts the scripture. Now I personally reached out to Pastor Jennings in the Summer of 2003 to accept his open-challenge to debate the issue (See True Islam Responds to Pastor Gino Jennings). He eventually made it clear that, while the invitation to debate him was still open to other followers of the Hon. Elijah Muhammad, it was not open to me. I can only speculate as to why.

In any case, it can be demonstrated empirically that all of the above detractors are simply wrong. The God of the Prophets, from Abraham to Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh, the God of the scriptures, is indeed a man, a black man. The problem, particularly in the case of Pastor Jennings and Rev. Price, is that they were dependent on the King James translation of the Bible. But it was for good reason that King James had

¹⁹Seethedebateathttp://www.truthofgod.com/site/pages/media_telecasts_4.asp.

²⁰Volume 3: ***Jesus, Christianity and Islam*** (Los Angeles: FaithOne Publishing, 2002).

²¹***Race, Religion, and Racism***, 7.

²²***Race, Religion, and Racism***, 12.

the scripture “translated out of the original tongues, diligently compared and revised”. It is the God of the Hebrew prophets, as witnessed in the Hebrew Scriptures, who is without any doubt a man. Had Pastor Jennings and Rev. Price availed themselves to the *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia* they would presumably have been much more restrained in their condemnation of Elijah Muhammad. Had they been better conversant with History-of-Religions scholarship, they would have known that the god whom they champion, that formless spirit, is the god not of Scripture but of Greek philosophy.²³ But as things go, they did neither. It is therefore our intension here, in this Introduction to the ‘Truth of God,’ to provide only some of the overwhelming evidence that the God of the scriptures is a man, evidence which I indicated to Pastor Jennings I could provide, and on account of which he refused my acceptance of his challenge. The whole of this evidence is currently being prepared as a manuscript to be published, it is hoped, soon.

2. *Is the biblical God a formless, immaterial Spirit?*

Rev. Fred Price argued:

Mr. Muhammad goes on to state...: ‘Did God say that He was a Mystery God, or did someone say it of Him? If He were a spirit and not a man, we would all be spirits and not human beings!’ *It appears Mr. Muhammad has not accurately read the Bible* (emphasis mine-TT), which clearly states that God is a Spirit, and so is man...In John 4:24 (KJV), it records the fact that Jesus, speaking to the woman at the well in Samaria, referred to God as follows: ‘...**God is a Spirit...**’ (emphasis original) John also says, in Chapter 1, Verse 1, ‘**In the Beginning was the Word (Jesus) and the word was with God...**’ If the word, Jesus, was ‘with God,’ the Word should know who, or what, God was or wasn’t. In John 4:24...Jesus Himself said, ‘...God is a Spirit...’ But Mr. Muhammad says, ‘God is a man and not a spirit’...Somebody is confused here.²⁴

In fairness to Rev. Price, the average reader of John 4:24 also assumes that, as a spirit, God is here described as formless and immaterial. Again, spirituality is commonly thought to necessitate incorporeality (lacking a body).²⁵ They also assume that, since God is spirit, he can’t be a man. But, as we shall demonstrate, these assumptions betray an unfamiliarity on the part of these readers with the scriptures in their original Hebrew and Greek contexts.

2.1 *Not ‘A’ Spirit*

Firstly, the King James translation of John 4:24, used by Rev. Price, is wrong. The Greek πνευμα ὁ θεός (Latin *spiritus est deus*) is not “God is a Spirit” but simply “God is spirit.” The absence of the indefinite article is grammatically small but theologically significant as it indicates that John 4:24 is not attempting an ontological definition of God, i.e. God is *a* spirit as opposed, for instance, to *a* man.²⁶ This is confirmed by 1 John 1:5, “God is Light”, and 1 John 4:8, “God is Love,” where the same constructions are used: God is certainly not *actually* a light, i.e. a natural luminary or a human emotion. God is spiritual, but not *a* spirit. This is confirmed by the Hebrew Bible (HB, i.e. Old Testament) background to this passage, Isa. 31:3, “The Egyptians are human(*’ādām*) and not divine(*’ēl*); and their horses are flesh(*bāšār*), and not spirit(*rū^ah*).”²⁷ Here the two contrasting sets, human(*’ādām*) vs. divine(*’ēl*) and flesh(*bāšār*) vs. spirit(*rū^ah*) are parallel and therefore *’ādām* is synonymous with *bāšār* and *’ēl* with *rū^ah*.²⁸ These terms are used adjectivally²⁹ to contrast the corruptible, mortal sphere with the eternal, powerful, and creative divine sphere.³⁰ But they do not describe God as *a* spirit:

²³ See below.

²⁴ *Race, Religion, and Racism*, 24.

²⁵ See above, n. 4.

²⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John. Introd., translation, and notes*. The *Anchor Bible*, no. 29-29A (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1966-), 172: “This is not an essential definition of God, but a description of God’s dealing with men.”

²⁷ On Isa. 31:3 as background to John 4:24 see A. M. Hunter, *The Gospel According to John. Commentary* (Cambridge [Eng.], University Press, c1965) 160; Otto Betz, “‘To Worship God in Spirit and in Truth’: Reflections on John 4, 20-26,” in A. Finkel and R. Frizel (edd.), *Standing Before God: Studies on Prayer in Scripture and in Tradition with Essays in Honor of John M. Oesterreicher* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1981) 59.

²⁸ *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (hereafter *TDOT*; Grand Rapids, Mich., W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., [1974 -]) 1:330s.v.

“*bāšār*” by N.P. Bratsiotis.

²⁹ K. Van Der Toorn, “God(1)” in *DDD*, 361.

³⁰ Betz, “‘To Worship God,’” 71, n. 13; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (hereafter *TDNT*; Grand Rapids, Mich., Eerdmans 1964-) 6:365s.v. “πνευμα,” by Baumgärtel.

The Spirit is not identical with God but is the agency of his historical activity in the world...(T)he doctrine of the spirituality of God has no place in the OT. The apparent exception is Isa. 31:3...Even here, however, the issue is not the spirituality of God in opposition to anything material, but that of his vitality as opposed to the creaturely weakness upon which an alliance with Egypt rests (cf. vs. 1). Yahweh is not pure spirit, for his Spirit, like his Word, is the agency of his activity.”³¹

Shailer Mathews notes also:

Even among the prophets Jahweh was described with such vivid anthropomorphism as to enable persons to form a mental picture of his appearance. Not only was he portrayed as an old man with white hair, but he had passions and policies like those of the rulers of his time...The conception of God as spirit DID NOT APPEAR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. To the theologizing historians who in the eighth century (B.C.) unified and expanded the literary data of their religion, GOD WAS NOT A SPIRIT BUT POSSESSED A SPIRIT (emphasis mine-TT).³²

2.2. Biblical ‘Spirit’ Not Immaterial and Formless

The contrast in Isa. 31:3 between divine spirit and mortal flesh, and the denial to God of the latter, is significant. The broader context of John 4:24 implies the same contrast.³³ We will look further at this opposition below. But for now it is important to point out that the contrast does not mean spirit is immaterial. “(S)pirit in the biblical tradition is not simply an abstraction, but a fairly concrete image.”³⁴ Both the Hebrew רוּחַ, *rûḥ* and Greek πνεῦμα, *pneuma* literally mean “wind, breath, air in motion” and thus contain a definite, if subtle and rarified materiality. “The constitutive factor of πνεῦμα in the Greek world is always its subtle and powerful corporeality.”³⁵ Herman Gunkel, in his groundbreaking religio-historical study on the Holy Spirit,³⁶ noted that the Hebrew *rûḥ* in Jewish tradition, even when applied to Yahweh, was materially conceived, a kind of *Lichtstoff* (light-particles).³⁷ Thus we see that Louis Berkhof’s statement, “The idea of spirituality of necessity excludes the ascription of anything like corporeity to God,”³⁸ is simply unbiblical.³⁹

Nor is the biblical ‘Spirit’ necessarily formless. In fact, it is, at least in some case, clearly anthropomorphic. Thus, in Job 4:12-21 Eliphaz⁴⁰ describes seeing a spirit *rûḥ* pass by so terrifying that the hair on Eliphaz’s body bristled (v.15).⁴¹ Eliphaz could see the form (תְּמוּנָה) of the *rûḥ* stand (יָעַמַּד) before his eyes and could hear its voice (קוֹל, v.16). Though he could not exactly make out its appearance (מַרְאֶה), “The description clearly suggests some type of anthropomorphic appearance.”⁴² It is quite possible that this anthropomorphic *rûḥ* is one of the *’ēlōhîm* (gods) of the divine assembly.⁴³ Likewise, in Ezekiel 8:2, the

³¹ Anderson, “God, OT view of,” *The Interpreter’s dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (hereafter *IDB*; New York :Abingdon Press,[1962])3:422f.

³² *The Growth of The Idea of God* (New York:Macmillan Company,1931),71-2

³³ *TDNT*6:439s.v. “πνεῦμα”; Betz, “To Worship God,” 59;

³⁴ Marcus J. Borg, “The God Who is Spirit,” in Karen Armstrong and Frederick W. Schmidt (edd.), *The Changing Face of God* (Harrisburg,PA:Morehouse Publishing,2000)47.

³⁵ *TDNT*6:239s.v. “πνεῦμα,” 357.

³⁶ *Die Wirkungen des heiligen Geistes, nach der populären Anschauung der apostolischen Zeit und nach der Lehre des Apostels Paulus* (‘The Effect of the Holy Spirit according to the popular view during the Apostolic Era and according to the Doctrine of the Apostle Paul’)(Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1888)47f.

³⁷ Paul Volz, *Der Geist Gottes und die verwandten Erscheinungen im Alten Testament und im anschliessenden Judentum* (“The Spirit of God and Related Phenomena in the Old Testament and in Later Judaism”) (1910) used a similar term: *ruach-Stoff*, “spirit matter” (23). The Qumran documents (Dead Sea Scrolls) likewise attest to a corporeal pneumatology: ‘spirits’ *rûḥôt* are material substances. See Deborah Dimant, “Dualism at Qumran: New Perspectives,” in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Caves of Enlightenment: Proceedings of the American Schools of Oriental Research Dead Sea Scrolls Jubilee Symposium (1947-1997)* (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1998) 55-72.

³⁸ *Systematic Theology* 66.

³⁹ See further below.

⁴⁰ On the possibility that Eliphaz is only recounting another’s experience see Gary V. Smith, “Job IV: 12-21 Is it Eliphaz’s Vision?” *Vetus Testamentum* (hereafter *VT*) 4(1990):453-63.

⁴¹ See Shalom M. Paul, “Job 4:15—A Hair Raising Encounter,” *ZAW* 95(1983):118-121.

⁴² Hamori, “‘When Gods Were Men,’” 178-9.

⁴³ See especially James E. Harding, “A Spirit of Deception in Job 4:15? Indeterminacy and Eliphaz’s Vision,” *Biblical Interpretation* 13 (2005): 137-66. On the Divine Council in Hebrew Literature see Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. diss., unpublished, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004; Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Hosts of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pentateuch as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1994); Patrick D. Miller, “Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic Political Symbol,” in idem,

prophet sees the divine *Kavod* (Glory) like a man (דמות כמראה איש⁴⁴) which he identifies as the Spirit (רוח; v. 3). In I Sam 28:3-19 when the medium of En-Dor raised for Saul the spirit of Samuel it had the form (תאר) of an old man (איש זקן; v. 13). This anthropomorphic spirit is explicitly identified as an אלהים, *ʾēlōhīm* “divinity.”⁴⁵ Josephus (*Ant.*, 6.332f) provides evidence that this anthropomorphic ‘spirit’ or spiritual man represented what God himself was thought to be like, at least in some circles. In his rendering of this story, the medium of En-Dor describes Samuel’s appearance as “God-like (θεοσπειρη)” and, upon Saul’s question, answered that she saw “someone in form like God.”⁴⁶ John R. Levison has demonstrated that Isaiah 63:7-14 and Haggai 2:5 presuppose a tradition in which the Spirit of Yahweh, the Angel of the Presence (מלאך פנין), and the anthropomorphic *mal’āk YHWH*⁴⁷ (Angel of the Lord) who delivered Israel from Egypt to Canaan were identified.⁴⁸ This all demonstrates that divine spirituality in the HB is anthropomorphic, not “invisible and intangible...without form and substance.”⁴⁹

Flesh (בשר *bāśār*/σαρξ, *sarx*), in both the HB and NT, was characterized by weakness, corruption, and mortality, all that is antithetical to God, who therefore had no relation to it.⁵⁰ But this does not mean he is incorporeal, as H. Wheeler Robinson points out:

Isaiah 31:3, “the Egyptians are men (*ʿādām*) and not God (*ʾēl*), and their horses flesh and not spirit.” The whole realm of spiritual energies belong to Yahweh, here identified with *rūach*, and over against Him stands all material existence, including man himself, here virtually identified with *bāśar*, flesh. But to speak of God as ‘spirit’ does not mean that Yahweh is formless...The majestic figure seen by Isaiah in the temple is in human form, though endowed with superhuman qualities. If we ask for further definition, we shall find that the ‘glory’ of Yahweh, His full visible manifestation, is conceived in terms of dazzling and unbearable light. Yahweh’s body is shaped like man’s, but its substance is not flesh but ‘spirit,’ and spirit seen as a blaze of light. It is true that the imageless worship of prophetic religion repudiates the making of any likeness of God, and no form was seen in the storm-theophany of Sinai (Deut. iv. 12). But it is one thing to shrink from the vision of the form, and another to deny that a form exists, though a form wrought out of *rūach*-substance.”⁵¹

Even pre-lapsarian Adam (i.e. Adam before his fall), who was clearly anthropomorphic, lacked flesh. His body was material, made from the ‘dust from the ground מן־האדמה’ (Gen. 2:7), but he did not acquire his כְּתָנוֹת עוֹר, ‘coats of skin’, i.e. fleshy body, until after his fall (Gen. 3:21).⁵² The Apostle Paul thus distinguished man’s physical body σωμα σαρκακον of Gen. 2:7 from his fleshy body σωμα της σαρκος (Rom. 6:6; 7:24; Col. 2:11) of Gen. 3:21.⁵³ Paul also affirms the anthropomorphic nature of spirit. He can refer to

Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays (JSOTSupp 267; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2000) 422-444 ; E. Theodore Mullen Jr. *The Assembly of the Gods* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 24; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1980).

⁴⁴ Following the LXX simplified rather than the MT’s אש.

⁴⁵ On the various significances of *ʾēlōhīm* in the Hebrew Bible see now Dmitri Slivniak, “Our God(s) is One: Biblical אלהים and the Indeterminacy of Meaning,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 19 (2005) 5-23.

⁴⁶ *Antiquities*, 6.332f.

⁴⁷ On the anthropomorphic *mal’āk YHWH* see now Kugle, *God of Old*, 5-36; , Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998), Chap. Three; Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, Chap. 1; *DDD*, s.v. “Angel of Yahweh,” by S.A. Meier, 53-58.

⁴⁸ “The Angelic Spirit in Early Judaism,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 34 (1995): 464-493.

⁴⁹ G.H. Dix, “The Seven Archangels and the Seven Spirits,” *Journal of Theological Studies* (hereafter *JTS*) 28 (1926-27): 245, 248, 250.

⁵⁰ See Bratsiotis, “בשר *bāśār*.” 317-332; *TDNT* VII: 100ff. s.v., σαρξ.

⁵¹ H. Wheeler Robinson, ‘Hebrew Psychology,’ in *The People and the Book*, ed. Arthur S. Peake (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 367.

⁵² There is a long tradition of interpreting כְּתָנוֹת עוֹר as Adam’s fleshy body. See Philo *Deus* 56; *QG* 1, 53; Stephen D. Ricks, “The Garment of Adam in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Tradition,” in Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes and Fred Astren (edd.), *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communications and Interactions*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 203-225; M.E. Vogelzang and W.J. van Bakkum, “Meaning and Symbolism of Clothing in Ancient Near Eastern Texts,” in *Scripta signa vocis: studies about scripts. Scripturae, scribes, and languages in the Near East, presented to J.H. Hossain by his pupils, colleagues, and friends* (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1986) 272ff; Gary Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 117-134; idem, “The Garments of Skin in Apocryphal Narrative and Biblical Commentary,” in James L. Kugel (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Midrash* (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2001) 110-125; Stephen N. Lambden, “From Fig Leaves to Fingernails: Some Notes on the Garments of Adam and Eve in the Hebrew Bible and Select Early Postbiblical Jewish Writings,” in Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer (edd.), *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) 79-82.

⁵³ See especially discussion in Nils Alstrup Dahl and David Hellholm, “Garment-Metaphors: the Old and the New Human Being,” Adela Yarbro Collins and Margaret M. Mitchell (edd.), *Antiquity and Humanity. Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy Presented to Hans Dieter Betz on His 70th Birthday* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 147-150.

the resurrected Christ as a “life-giving spirit (1 Cor. 14:15)” and could even declare that “the Lord is the Spirit (ὁ δε κυριος το πνευμα εστιν; 2Cor. 3:17).” While the identification of the κυριος (“Lord”) here has been the source of great disagreement, Mehrdad Fatchi has, it seems to me, put the question beyond dispute: the Lord here is the exalted Christ⁵⁴ who is ‘the Spirit’ in spite of the fact that he is a man. Regarding Paul’s description of Christ as a πνευμα ζωοποιουν, “life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 14:15), James Dunn pointed out that it presupposes Christ’s possession of what Paul calls a σωμα πνευματικον, *soma pneumatikos* “spiritual body.”⁵⁵ This was a substantive body, but one lacking flesh, σαρξ, *sarx*. Paul

affirms also that pneumatic existence is a form of existence neither physical/fleshy nor incorporeal. There are many kinds of σωματα (bodies), heavenly as well as earthy, non-fleshy as well as fleshy (15:40).⁵⁶

And Paul affirms, in agreement with the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish tradition, that God has a luminous and spiritual, yet anthropomorphic body. Christ’s luminous *soma pneumatikos* or spiritual body, also called ‘Body of Glory(σωμα της δοξης, *soma tes doxes*)’ to which the believer’s physical bodies will be conformed at the Parousia, i.e. Jesus’ second coming (Phil. 3:21), is the image(εικων, *eikōn*) of God’s own form(μορφη θεου, *morphē theos*; Col. 1:15; II Cor 4:4; Phil. 2:6). As a number of scholars have demonstrated, Paul’s use of μορφη θεου, *morphē theos* ‘Form of God’ in Phil. 2:6 is rooted in the Jewish tradition of God’s luminous, anthropomorphic form, the כבוד, *Kavod*/Glory, after which Adam was created.⁵⁷ Christ’s ‘Body of Glory’ is a likeness(εικων, *eikōn*) of this form: “He who has seen me has seen the Father (Jhn. 14:9),” for he looks just like God.

3. The Greek Philosophic Origins of Divine Incorporeality

Hebrew as well as NT Greek spirituality, even divine spirituality, was therefore corporeal. It is in Greek philosophic tradition that such ideas as divine incorporeality begin: in fact, it is to this tradition that we owe the very concept of “immateriality.” As R. Renehan notes in his important study, “On the Greek Origins of the Concepts Incorporeality and Immateriality”⁵⁸:

Few concepts have been more influential, for better or worse, in the history of Western philosophy and theology than those of incorporeal beings and immaterial essences. Their importance for the particular

⁵⁴ *The Spirit’s Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul. An Examination of Its Christological Implications* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000). See also the brief but poignant comments in *TDNT* 6:439s.v. “πνευμα” 418-19.

⁵⁵ “1 Corinthians 15:45 – last Adam, life-giving spirit,” in Barnabas Lindars, Stephen S. Smalley (edd.), *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973) 138.

⁵⁶ Dunn, “1 Corinthians 15:45,” 129. See also idem, “The ‘Body’ in Colossians,” in Thomas E. Schmidt and Moisés Silva (edd.), *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honor of Robert H. Gundry* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1994) 162-81; Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven/London: Yale, 1995) 6; W.D. Davis, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (3rd Edition; London: SPCK, 1970) 177ff; Joachim Jeremiás, “‘Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God’ (1 Cor. XV.50),” *NTS* 2(1955-6): 151-159.

⁵⁷ Gilles Quispel, “Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism,” *VC* 34 (1980): 1-13; Jarl Fossum, “Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism,” *VC* 37 (1983): 26-287; idem, “The Image of the Invisible God: Colossians 1.15-18a in the Light of Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism,” in idem, *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christianity* (Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1995) 13-39; Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1981) 137-267; Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, “Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Μετατροπή and Christ,” *HTR* 76 (1987): 269-288; Alan F. Segal, “Paul and the Beginning of Jewish Mysticism,” in John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (edd.), *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995) 95-122; idem, *Paul the Convert. The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1990) 35-71; idem, “The Risen Christ and the Angelic Mediator Figures in Light of Qumran,” in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 302-328; Markus Bockmuehl, “‘The Form of God’ (Phil. 2:6): Variation on a Theme of Jewish Mysticism,” *JTS* 48 (1997) 1-23; Morna D. Hooker, “Adam Redivivus: Philippians 2 Once More,” in Steve Moyise (ed.), *The Old Testament in the New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2000) 220-234. On *morphē* in Phil. 2:6 as the “visible aspect or physical appearance of God” See also Dave Steenburg, “The Case Against the Synonymity of *Morphē* and *Eikōn*,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (hereafter *JSNT*) 34 (1988): 77-86. See also Behm, *TDNT* 4:751 s.v. “μορφη” who notes that: “The μορφη θεου (Form of God) in which the pre-existent Christ was simply the divine δοξα (doxa/Glory).” On the relation of the Greek *doxa*, Hebrew *Kavod*, and the form of God see also L.H. Brockington, “The Septuagintal Background to the New Testament use of ΔΟΞΑ,” in D.E. Nineham, *Studies in the Gospels. Essays in Memory of R.H. Lighfoot* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955) 1-8; R.P. Martin, “μορφη in Philippians ii.6,” *Expository Times* 70 (1958-59): 183-84. On God’s anthropomorphic *Kavod* in Biblical tradition see further Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972) 191-209, esp. 200-206; idem, *TDOT* 7:31-33 s.v. כבוד; Trygve N.D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kavod Theologies* (CWK Gleerup, 1982) Chapters Three and Four; J.E. Fossum, “Glory,” *DDD* 348-52.

⁵⁸ Renehan, “On the Greek.”

directions which European thought long took pondering such problems as the nature of deity, soul, intellect, in short, of ultimate reality, is not easily exaggerated...Such concepts are the creation of Greek philosophy. Prior to that even 'spirit' was material, in Egypt, Greece, and elsewhere.⁵⁹

A number of Presocratics (i.e. Greek philosophers before the time of Socrates) laid 'stepping stones' leading to a fully explicit notion of incorporeality/immateriality. The Ionian philosopher of Colophon Xenophanes (570-475 BCE) posited an abstract and non-anthropomorphic deity that would be highly influential to the development of the Christian doctrine of divine transcendence with its characteristic notion of divine incorporeality/immateriality.⁶⁰ But for all its abstraction Xenophanes' deity was still corporeal.⁶¹ "When all is said and done, it must be recognized that one man was responsible for the creation of an ontology which culminates in incorporeal Being as the truest and highest reality. That man was Plato."⁶² Renehan suggests that it was Plato who coined the term *ασωματος*, *asomatos* (incorporeal).⁶³ Plato's incorporeal Form (εἶδος/ἰδέα) of the Good, however, was not God.⁶⁴ It seems to have been his student Aristotle (384-322 BCE) who, understanding the full implications of the term *ασωματος*, first used it of the deity, his Unmoved Mover (*Cael.* 279a17ff, *Metaph.* 1073a5ff).⁶⁵ This novel Platonic/Aristotelian notion of divine incorporeality/immateriality will be taken up and elaborated in Hellenistic Judaism, Patristic Christianity, and heterodox Islam.⁶⁶

4. The Man-God of Biblical Tradition

This incorporeal, non-anthropomorphic deity of the Greeks is in stark contrast to the God of biblical tradition. The God of the Hebrew Bible is without question a man. He is anthropomorphic: he has a

⁵⁹ Renehan, "On the Greek Origins," 105.

⁶⁰ On Xenophanes' deity v. Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers. The Gifford Lectures, 1936* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1947) 43ff. On Xenophanes' influence on Christian thought v. Eric Osborn, "Irenaeus on God-Argument and Parody," *StPatr.* 36 (2001): 270-281; William R. Schoedel, "Enclosing, Not Enclosed: The Early Christian Doctrine of God," in W.R. Schoedel and R.L. Wilken (edd.), *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Tradition. In Honorem R.M. Grant* (Théologie historique 54; Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1979) 75-86.

⁶¹ See discussion in Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Dim Body, Dazzling Body," in Michal Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (edd.), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* (New York: Zone, 1989) 21; Jaeger, *Theology of the Early Greek*, 43.

⁶² Renehan, "On the Greek Origins," 138.

⁶³ Renehan, "On the Greek Origins," 127-130.

⁶⁴ J.B. Skemp, "Plato's Concept of Deity," in *Zetesis. Album amicorum door vrienden en collega's aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. E. de Strycker ter gelegenheid van zijn 65e verjaardag* (Antwerpen, De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1973) 115-121.

⁶⁵ Renehan, "On the Greek Origins," 134-5.

⁶⁶ Schoedel, "Enclosing, Not Enclosed," notes:

the antithesis, 'enclosing, not enclosed', first gains currency in Philo as a description of God and seems to owe its striking formulation to an impulse to go beyond the Greek tradition in emphasizing the divine transcendence. To say that God encloses all things and is not enclosed means for Philo (a) that God is immaterial and not in a place, (b) that he is unknowable in his essence, and (c) that he is creator of all things (*Migr. Abr.* 183; cf. *Leg. alleg.* 3:51...). Such themes presuppose a God who transcends the cosmos and is not simply (as in Greek philosophy) a factor in the totality of things. To be sure, the emphasis on God's immateriality reflects, as an isolate them, Plato more than the Bible (emph. mine-WW). But it points here in a new direction. For ultimately, it was to provide a context within which the infinite 'could be detached from the concept of the corporeal, with which it had been essentially united in Greek thought'. An indication of the novelty of Philo's thought in this connection is the emphasis, perhaps for the first time, on the idea that the essence of God is unknowable.

See also John M. Dillon, "The Transcendence of God in Philo: Some Possible Sources," *Protocol of the Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenism and Modern Culture* 16 (1975): 1-22; Harry A. Wolfson, "Maimonides of the Unity and Incorporeality of God," *JQR* 56 (1965): 112-136. On Patristic Christianity v. Wilken, *Christian Fathers* 13, 17, and above n. 8. See also Schoedel, "Enclosing, Not Enclosed"; Robert P. Casey, "Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Platonism," *HTR* 18 (1925): 39-101; Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "The Incorporeality of God: Context and Implication of Origen's Position," *Rel* 13 (1983): 345-358; Frances M. Young, "The God of the Greeks and the Nature of Religious Language," in William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken (eds.), *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition. In Honorem Robert M. Grant* (Théologie historique 53; Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1979) 45-74; G. Jantzen, *God's World, God's Body* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 23-35; Roland J. Teske, S.J., "The Aim of Augustine's Proof that God truly Is," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1986): 253-268. On Islam see below and Morris S. Seal, *Muslim Theology: A Study of Origins with Reference to the Church Fathers* (London: Luzac and Company Limited, 1964); R.M. Frank, "The Neoplatonism of Ḡahm Ibn Ṣafwān," *Museon* 78 (1965): 395-424; idem, "The Divine Attributes According to the Teachings of Abu-L-Hudhayl Al-'Allaf," *Museon* 82 (1969): 451-506; Daud Rahbar, "Relation of Muslim Theology to the Qur'an," *MW* 51 (1961): 44-49. On the early orthodox rejection of Greek scientific works thought to be "contaminated" by theological elements see Ignaz Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam Toward the 'Ancient Sciences,'" in Merlin L. Swartz (ed.), *Studies on Islam* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 185-215.

human form. He is anthropopathic: he has human feelings. And, importantly, he is called a man repeatedly in the HB, a fact lost in the various English translations. Hebrew has five words (plus their derivatives) for man: אִישׁ, *ʾiš*, גִּבּוֹר, *geber*, אָדָם, *ʾādām*, אָנוֹשׁ, *ʾnôš* and מֶת, *mt*. The last three terms connote human frailty and as such are never applied to God.⁶⁷ It is a different story, however, with אִישׁ and גִּבּוֹר. These two terms connote strength, kingship, and spirituality⁶⁸ and the HB declares that God is this sort of man⁶⁹: Yahweh is an אִישׁ and גִּבּוֹר, or rather גִּבּוֹר, *gibbôr*, mighty man.⁷⁰ The Book of Exodus states emphatically יהוה אִישׁ מלחמה *YHWH ʾišmilh āmah*, “Yahweh is a man of war (15:3).”⁷¹ This is not a metaphor, but a divine title⁷² and, according to rabbinic tradition, a description of how Yahweh physically appeared to the Hebrews at the Red Sea. Thus, ***Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shim’on bar Yoḥai***: “Another interpretation: ‘YHWH is a man of war, YHWH is His name.’ Because when the Holy One, blessed be He, was revealed at the sea He appeared as a young man making war. ‘YHWH is His name.’”⁷³

Ex. 15:3 is not the only time Yahweh is referred to as an אִישׁ.⁷⁴ God speaks to Moses face to face, “as a man (אִישׁ) speaketh to his friend (Ex. 33:11).” He appears to Abraham as one of three *ʾānāšim* (plural of אִישׁ).⁷⁵ Jacob wrestles with a man (אִישׁ) at Penuel whom he would later identify as Elohim/God (Gen. 32:31).⁷⁶

⁶⁷ *TDOT* 1:75-87 s.v. אָדָם, *ʾādām* by Maass; 1:345-348 s.v. אָנוֹשׁ, *ʾnôš* by Maass; 9:98-102 s.v. מֶת, *mt*; *IDB* 3:242-46 sv. “Man, Nature of, in the OT.”

⁶⁸ *TDOT* 1:222-235 s.v. אִישׁ, *ʾiš*; *ʾišhāh*, by N.P. Bratsiotis; Michael Chernick, “As Man and Adult in the Halakic Midrashim,” *The Jewish Quarterly* 73:3 (January, 1983): 254-280; A.F.L. Beeston, “An Alternative Meaning for אִישׁ in the Old Testament,” *VT* 24 (1974): 110ff; *TDOT*, 2:367-382 s.v. גִּבּוֹר, *gābhar* by Hans Kosmala; *ibid*, “The Term *Geber* in the Old Testament and in the Scrolls,” *Congress Volume, Rome 1968* (VT Sup 17; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969) 158-69; Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism. Haggadic Studies* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983) 56-66; A. Shafaat, “Geber of the Qumran Scrolls and the Spirit-Paraclete of the Gospel of John,” *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 263-69.

⁶⁹ Gen. 18:32; 24:30; Ex. 15:3; 33:11; Isa. 54:4; Hos. 2:18; Ps. 24:7-10; Isa. 42:13; Zeph. 1:14, 3:17; Jer. 20:11. Artur Marmerslein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God: Essays in Anthropomorphism* (New York: Ktav, 1937), 7ff, 65ff; J. Massingberd Ford, “The Epithet ‘Man’ for God,” *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 38 (1971): 72-76.

⁷⁰ Ps. 24:7-10; Isa. 42:13; Zeph. 1:14, 3:17.

⁷¹ Or maybe “Yahweh—that man of war Whose name is Yahweh.” See David N. Freedman, “Strophe and Meter in Exodus 15,” in Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim, Carey A. Moore (edd.), *A Light unto My Path, Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 171. The Samaritan and Aramaic translations have for the most part retained the designations or its sense. Thus, the Samaritan Pentateuch has *gibbôr* in place of אִישׁ. The Palestinian Targums (N., Ps. Jon, FT) has *gibr* (גִּבְרָא) “man.” (See Michael L. Klein, *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch According to their Extant Sources* 2 vols. [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980], 1:78). Targum Neofiti, “Yahweh is a man (gibr) making wars.” Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, “Yahweh is a man (gibr) who makes wars in every generation.” Some Jewish exegetes apparently felt embarrassed by this “bold anthropomorphism” however. Onqelos, for example, has “Yahweh is master (mrî) of victory in battle.” See Israel Drazin’s comments in his *Targum Onkelos to Exodus* (Denver: Ktav Publishing House, Inc and Center for Judaic Studies, 1990), 153 n. 15. The Jerusalem Fragment (Frg. Trg. V) has “The Lord is a man: The Lord, through/with His *y’qar š’kinta* (the glory of His Shekinah) conducts your victorious battles for you.” See Klei n, *The Fragment-Targums*, 1:171, 2:129.

⁷² For *ʾiš milhāmā* as a divine title see William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18* (New York: Double Day), 515; also Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 202-204.

⁷³ See Arthur Green, “The Children in Egypt and the Theophany at the Sea,” *Judaism* 24 (1975): 446-456; Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 35; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 33ff. This verse was cited by the Sages of the Babylonia Talmud as proof that God appeared in the Bible as an actual man. See *Balvi Sanhedrin* 1:1, XLII [93A]:

And said R. Yohanan, “What is the meaning of the verse of Scripture, ‘I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom’ (Zech. 1:8)?”

What is the meaning of, ‘I saw by night’?

The Holy One, blessed be he, sought to turn the entire world into night.

‘And behold a man riding’ - ‘man’ refers only to the Holy One, blessed be he, as it is said, ‘The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name’ (Ex. 15:3)

‘On a red horse’ - the Holy One, blessed be he, sought to turn the entire world to blood.

When, however, he saw Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah, he cooled off, as it is said, ‘And he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the deep.’

On these passages see Jacob Neusner, *The Incarnation of God: The Character of Divinity in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 169.

⁷⁴ Pace Ford, “The Epithet ‘Man’,” 72.

⁷⁵ On these passages see below.

⁷⁶ On Jacob’s struggle with God in Gen. 32 see Hamori, “When Gods Were Men,” Chap. 3; David F. Pennant, “Genesis 32: Lighten our Darkness, Lord, we Pray,” in Richard S. Hess, Gordon J. Wenham and Philip E. Satterthwaite (edd.) *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12-50* (2nd Ed.: Carlisle, UK and Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Press and Baker Book House, 1994) 175-183; Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 184; Johannes Lindblom, “Theophanies in Holy Places in Hebrew Religion,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* (hereafter *HUCA*) 32 (1961): 99 notes: “the chief interest of the present narrator was to say that the man who wrestled with

In both Hosea (2:18) and Isaiah (54:4) God even uses it as a self-designation.⁷⁷ God is also a גִּבּוֹר, *gibbôr* “mighty man,”⁷⁸ which is the intensive form of גִּבֵּר *geber*.⁷⁹ He is called a *gibbôr milhāmāh*, “mighty man of war” (Ps. 24:7-10; also Isa. 42:13). In the Dead Sea Scrolls God is called a “mighty man of war (*gibbôr hamilhamah*)” and “man of glory” (יִשְׁרָאֵל *ʾiṣṛāʾēl*) (*IQM*, xii, 9-10; *IQM*, xix, 2). Thus, even Marjo Korpel, in her extensive study *A Rift in the Clouds, Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine*, concedes that “in the Bible God appears as a man [יִשְׁרָאֵל].”⁸⁰ Walter Eichrodt, in his *Old Testament Theology*, notes also that “God is, without doubt, thought of also in human form, more specifically as a man.”⁸¹

4.1. Anthropomorphic Theophany

These descriptions of God as a man are not metaphorical. The proof of this statement is in the theophany narratives.⁸² In these, God appears to and is seen by the patriarchs and the prophets. When the patriarchs and prophets encountered God visually, they encountered a divine man, with a (w)holly, human form.⁸³ It is this anthropomorphic deity whom John the Revelator saw enthroned amidst 24 Elders (Chap. 4 and 5), themselves divine men-gods-constituting God’s Divine Council.⁸⁴ Now, the theophany narratives

Jacob was Yawhēh, who blessed the patriarch and gave him a new name, indicating the unique relationship of the chosen people to its God. Yahweh appeared to the patriarch in bodily shape; this occurred in the holy place of Peniel. See also Stephen A. Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), Chap. One; idem, “The Struggle at the Jabbok: the Uses of Enigma in a Biblical Narrative,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 14 (1982): 37-61; Tzemah Yoreh, “Jacob’s Struggle,” *ZAW* 117 (2004): 95-97; Steve McKenzie, “‘You Have Prevailed,’” *The Function of Jacob’s Encounter at Peniel in the Jacob Cycle*,” *Restoration Quarterly* 23 (1980): 225-231.

⁷⁷ On these verses v. Bratsiotis, *TDOT*, I:230f.

⁷⁸ Ps. 24:7-10; Isa. 42:13; Zeph. 1:14, 3:17.

⁷⁹ On *gibbôr*, *TDOT*, 2:367-382.

⁸⁰ Marjo Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds, Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990), 131. On God as an *ʾiṣ* v. J. Massingberd Ford, “The Epithet ‘Man’ for God,” *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 38 (1971): 72-76; V. Marmerslein, *op. cit.*

⁸¹ Walter Eichrodt, *Old Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), I:230.

⁸² From the Greek *theós* ‘god’ and the verb *phainō*, ‘to appear.’ Thus, theophanies are visual self-manifestations of the divine. J. Maxwell Miller (“In the ‘Image’ and ‘Likeness’ of God,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* [hereafter *JBL*] 91 [1972]: 292) correctly pointed out: “the theophanic tradition is perhaps the clearest evidence that this view (anthropomorphism) existed among the people of Israel. The biblical writers were extremely cautious, of course, when describing God’s theophanies, usually giving more attention to the surroundings of his appearance than to God himself. It is altogether clear from their descriptions, however, that God’s bodily form was understood to be essentially like that of a man.”

⁸³ On seeing God in biblical and extra-biblical Jewish and Christian tradition see *TDOT* 11:208-242 s.v. אֵלֹהִים *ʾĕlōhîm* by Fuhs; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 13-51; Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, “The Averted Gaze” in idem, *God’s Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) 59-80; Sven Tengström, “Les visions prophétiques du trône de Dieu et leur arrière-plan dans l’Ancien Testament,” in Marc Philonenko (ed.), *Le Trône de Dieu* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993) 28-99; Mark S. Smith, “‘Seeing God’ in the Psalms: The Background to the Beatific Vision in the Hebrew Bible,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (hereafter *CBQ*) 50 (1988): 171-183; Guy Couturier, “La Vision du Conseil Divin: étude d’une forme commune au prophétisme et à l’apocalyptique,” *Science et Esprit* 36 (1984): 5-43; Christopher Rowland, “The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* (hereafter *JSJ*) 10 (1979): 137-154; W.W. Graf Baudissin, “‘Gott schauen’ in der attestamentlichen Religion,” *ARW* 18 (1915): 173-239. Extra-biblical Jewish: Gary Anderson, “Towards a Theology of the Tabernacle and its Furniture,” paper presented to the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 2004 available at <http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/symposiums/9th/papers/AndersonPaper.pdf>; Maria E. Subtelny, “Tale of the Four Sages who Entered the *Parades*: A Talmudic Enigma from a Persian Perspective,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 11 (2004): 3-58; Boyarin, “The Eye in the Torah,” *op. cit.*; Ira Chernus, “Visions of God in Merkabah Mysticism,” *JSJ* 13 (1982): 123-146. Christian: Stephen D. Moore, “The Beatific Vision as a Posing Exhibition: Revelation’s Hypermasculine Deity,” *JSNT* 60 (1995): 27-55; Marianne Meyer Thompson, “‘God’s Voice You have never Heard, God’s Form you have never Seen’: The Characteristic of God in the Gospel of John,” *Semeia* 63 (1993): 177-204; April D. DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); idem, “Blessed are Those Who Have Not Seen (Jn 20:29): Johannine Dramatization of an Early Christian Discourse,” in John D. Turner and Anne McGuire (edd.), *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997) 381-397; Alexandre Golitzin, “‘The Demons Suggest an Illusion of God’s Glory in a Form’: Controversy Over the divine Body and Vision of Glory in Some Late Fourth, Early fifth Century Monastic Literature,” *Studia Monastica* 44 (2002): 13-43; idem, “The Vision of God and the Form of Glory: More Reflections on the Anthropomorphic Controversy of AD 399,” in John Behr, Andrew Louth, Dimitri Conomos (edd.), *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West: Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) 273-297.

⁸⁴ On the gods of the Divine Council see further *DDD* 734-800 s.v. “Sons of (the) Gods,” by S.B. Parker; John J. Collins, “Powers in Heaven: God, Gods, and Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in John J. Collins and Robert A. Kugler (edd.), *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) 9-28. On the Twenty Four Elders of Revelation 4-5 and the Divine Council see R. Dean Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment of Revelation 4-5* (New York and London: Lanham, 1992); Joseph M. Baumgarten, “The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran, Revelation, and the Sanhedrin,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 59-78.

are not to be compared with so-called ‘figurative anthropomorphisms’ of the Bible which are indeed often metaphors. The need for this distinction was expressed most eloquently by James Barr in his foundational article in 1959, “Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the OT”⁸⁵:

The theophanies in which the deity has appeared in human form have often, in treatments of the subject, been taken as merely one among many anthropomorphic statements or ways of speech, or at the most a particular class among them. Thus studies of anthropomorphism commonly begin with those often mentioned references to God’s hands, feet, ears, nose, his speaking, smelling, walking in gardens, shutting doors, laughing, wrestling, treading the winepress, rising early in the morning, rejoicing, being disgusted, changing his mind, being jealous, and so on; and the appearances of God in human form are lumped in with all of these as further examples of the same phenomenon. It seems desirable however to make some distinction between them. These frequent expressions about God’s ears or nose, his smelling or whistling, are not seriously anthropomorphisms in the sense of trying to come to grips with the form, the *morphe*, of God. The real reason for their prominence has been their offensiveness to rationalistic thought; and this has led scholars, no doubt quite properly, to point out their value in asserting the personality and activity of the God of Israel. But what is important for the modern justification of the Old Testament may be more trivial for the Old Testament times themselves. These expressions provide a rich vocabulary for the diversity of the divine activity; but for the more precise and particular question which the word “anthropomorphism” should suggest, the question of in what form, if any, God may be known, there is the danger of exaggerating their importance, just as, I submit, it is exaggerating of the importance of Hosea 5:14 or Amos 1:2 to call it a “theriomorphism” when Yahweh is like a lion to Ephraim or roars from Mt. Zion. In contrast with all of this, it is in theophanies where God lets himself be seen that there is a real attempt to grapple with the form of his appearance. Indeed, for Hebrew thought ‘form’ and ‘appearance’ may be taken as correlative, and where there is no ‘appearance’ a passage is of only secondary importance for the idea of form.”⁸⁶

Similarly important is the observation of Howard Eilberg-Schwartz:

To say the body is simply a metaphor like ‘God is a lion’ or ‘God the rock’ is to fail to take seriously the distinctive context in which images of the body are used...The ancient Judaic sources after all have special significance. They depict the exceptional cases of religious leaders who were privileged to see God... The point is that when they described seeing God, they evoked a human form. The image of the human body is thus of a different order than other metaphors that are used to refer to God. The comparison of God to a lion does not conjure up the image of a lion because this image is not used in contexts that describe God sightings. But when Moses is said to have seen the divine back, and Isaiah the divine robes, and Ezekiel the divine figure, the sources evoke a human image. The human body, then, is the privileged image for imagining what it might be like to gaze on the deity...In the texts of ancient Israel, then, we are dealing with at least two kinds of God images: (1) visual descriptions of what is seen when a character looks upon God and (2) conceptual representations that describe God in contexts in which seeing does not take place.⁸⁷

These observations are given sound confirmation by Jeffrey J. Niehaus who demonstrates through form-critical analysis that the theophany narratives partake of the same *Gattung* (literary-form) of the historical accounts of interviews between humans.

This parallel indicates the historical verisimilitude of the theophanies...And if, for instance, such an interview did take place between David and Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9:6-11) in the manner described, we may say that a historical event gave rise to the *Gattung* in that case...Theophanies from the Old Testament and from the ancient Near East are, therefore actually cast in a mode of historical reportage.⁸⁸

It is therefore in the theophany narrative that we find the surest source for understanding the nature of divine morphism. Space however, will only permit the examination of one such narrative.

⁸⁵ *VTSup* 7(1960):31-38.

⁸⁶ Barr, “Theophany and Anthropomorphism,” 31.

⁸⁷ *God’s Phallus*, 116.

⁸⁸ *God at Sinai: Covenant & Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995) 43-4.

4.2. *Anthropomorphic Realism*

The God of the world's great religions—all-powerful, all-knowing, invisible, and omnipresent—has been a staple of Western thought for some time. Yet...this God is not the same as the God of most of the Bible, the God who appeared to Abraham, Moses, and other biblical heroes. That God, the 'God of Old,' was actually perceived in a very different way...

The God of Old was not invisible or abstract. He *appeared* to people—usually unexpectedly; He was not sought out. He was not even recognized. Many biblical stories thus center on a 'moment of confusion,' in which an encounter with God is first mistaken for an ordinary, human meeting. In the biblical world...the spiritual and the material overlapped: everyday perception was in constant danger of sliding into something else, stark but oddly familiar. God was always standing just behind the curtain of ordinary reality.⁸⁹

This is how James Kugel's most recent, and most fascinating work, *the God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible*, is introduced. Kugel has as his objective uncovering, through an attentive examination of certain ancient (pre-exilic) texts of the HB, the ancient Israelite conception of God. As he clearly demonstrates, this conception, and that of the HB in general, differs vastly from our own. The remote, invisible, incorporeal deity of normative Judaism, Christianity and Islam stands in marked contrast to the anthropomorphic God of ancient Israel who appeared before men and women and was seen. Some of these visual encounters with God begin as encounters with an ordinary, indistinct man whom at least the reader only later discovers is God. This type of theophany is characterized by what Esther J. Hamori has called *anthropomorphic realism*, i.e. God appears as a realistic human being.⁹⁰ One such episode that Kugel lists in this category and which is treated in detail by Hamori is particularly important and will be examined here: Gen. 18.

4.2.1. *Genesis 18*

And Yahweh appeared unto him (Abraham) in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. Let a little water, I pray you be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort your hearts; after that ye shall pass on...And they said, 'So do as thou hast said.' And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, 'Make ready three measures of fine meal...and make cakes upon the hearth.' And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. And he took butter, and milk and the calf that he had dressed, And he set it before them; and he stood with them under the tree and they did eat...

And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And Yahweh said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?'...And Yahweh said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorra is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done according to the cry of it...

And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: But Abraham stood yet before Yahweh...And Yahweh went his way..."

This is truly an astonishing narrative. Robert Davidson, in his commentary, calls it a "profoundly mysterious story."⁹¹ Here, three men (*ʾānāšīm*, Sing. *ʾīš*, *ישׁ*) suddenly appear to Abraham, one of whom was, at least according to the narrator,⁹² Yahweh himself. Abraham entertains the three men with human food, which they did eat, and also invites them to "rest" under a tree, offering to wash their feet. Without a doubt we are dealing with a very bold theophany narrative. Such a presentation of the divine, as a man who eats, rests, and gets his feet washed, certainly does violence to all of our basic assumptions about God. It is not surprising therefore that some have attempted to extricate Yahweh from the epiphany, distinguishing him from the men.⁹³ But this reading is demonstrably untenable.⁹⁴ Likewise, attempts to

⁸⁹Kugel, *the God of Old*, front jacket flap.

⁹⁰...*'When Gods Were Men'*."

⁹¹Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 63.

⁹²Thus the chapter head, "Now Yahweh appeared to him in the plains of Mamre."

⁹³E.g. William T. Miller, *Mysterious Encounters at Mamre and Jabbok* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984) 38.

⁹⁴Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 3-8.

discern in these men an early appearance of the Trinity have been “universally abandoned by recent exegesis.”⁹⁵

The discussion over Yahweh’s relationship to the men often hinges on how one should translate יְהוָה at the beginning of v3. The Hebrew consonants are ambiguous and may be read three ways: ^hḏōnāy, (reg. pl. “my lords/sirs); ^hḏōnî (my lord/sir) or ^hḏōnāy (“Lord/my Lord”). If we see in these three men regular human beings, or even angels, we would render it “my lords” or “sirs.”⁹⁶ However, it is certain that the word is singular because the verbs are singular.⁹⁷ Thus it is certain that the addressee is singular.⁹⁸ Abraham’s invitation is directed at one of the three men. Is this one an angel, maybe of a higher rank than the other men, in which case we should translate the word as “my lord” (^hḏōnî)? Or is it Yahweh Himself who appears with the two other men/angels and is here addressed as “my Lord” (^hḏōnāy)? The Masoretic Text (MT), that is to say the standard Hebrew text behind the various English translations, and all the Versions⁹⁹ except the Samaritan and its Targum (Aramaic translation/paraphrase) read ^hḏōnāy, Lord. This is justified by v. 13 where Yahweh is clearly the subject; he is here the speaker and Abraham the addressee.

...Abraham never called himself servant when speaking to men; likewise he never approached any human being calling him ‘My Lord’-neither Pharaoh (ch. 12) nor Avimelech (cf. 20-21) nor when negotiating with Ephron the Hittite prince (ch. 23-here the other call him: Sir!); therefore it is very unlikely that he should have called one of the anonymous strangers ‘My Lord!’ On the other hand verses 27, 30, 31, 32 give sufficient proof that אֱלֹהֵי is in the whole chapter the appellative of God. Therefore we should accept in this case the interpretation of the Massorah, namely, Lord!¹⁰⁰

Many modern commentators, whether inclined to see this as a theophany (appearance of God) or an angelophany (appearance of an angel), disregard the ancient versions and read ^hḏōnî (my lord/sir).¹⁰¹ This reading is largely based on the assumption that, even if Yahweh was somehow related to the three men, Abraham could not have known so at this stage in the narrative.¹⁰² The singular mention of the name Yahweh late in the narrative (v. 13) is cited as evidence of a gradual awareness on the part of Abraham of the divine nature of his visitors whom he initially took to be normal wayfarers.¹⁰³ But the Masoretic reading, “My Lord,” implies that Abraham knew he had been visited by God.¹⁰⁴ As Jean-Paul Klein noted, Abraham had experienced a theophanic encounter with God previously at Shechem (Gen. 12:1-4a, 6-8).¹⁰⁵ There Yahweh “showed Himself (wayyērā’ (וַיֵּרָא))” to Abraham. Abraham then built an altar to God, who had “appeared to him (hannir’e(h) (הִנֵּרְאָה)).”¹⁰⁶ God would appear to Abraham again at Mamre/Hebron (Gen. 17:1-22). Thus, Abraham knew what Yahweh “looked like” and was well capable of recognizing him. The claim that Abraham ‘could not’ have known it was Yahweh before him is therefore not supported by the narrative.

The internal evidence, read without theological presupposition, establishes that Yahweh is one of the men. The chapter heading, “And Yahweh appeared to him in the plains of Mamre,” indicates that the later redactor of this narrative clearly took it as a tale of a theophany. In v. 2 Abraham “bowed himself to

⁹⁵Gerhard VonRadd, *Genesis, A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 206.

⁹⁶Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 62.

⁹⁷Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1981), 278.

⁹⁸The Samaritan reading ^hḏōnāy is therefore unacceptable. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 278.

⁹⁹ The Versions include the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint (LXX), the Aramaic translations called Targums (Targum Onkelos, Targum Ps.-Jonathan, Targum Neofiti), the Samaritan translation (Sam), and the Latin translation called the Vulgate. See Miller, *Mysterious Encounters*, 9.

¹⁰⁰Benjamin Uffenheimer, “Genesis 18-19, A New Approach,” in *Mélanges André Neher* (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1975) 150.

¹⁰¹E.g. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 273; Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 3; Robert Alter, *Genesis, Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), 77; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1964), 129. Even Hamori, “When Gods Were Men,” 9, 11.

¹⁰²Speiser, *Genesis*, 129; Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 11; VonRadd, *Genesis, A Commentary*, 206; Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 63;

¹⁰³Thus Davidson (*Genesis 12-50*, 63) argues that, “Part of the charm of the story, however, is that at the outset Abraham did not, and could not, know.” See also von Rad, *Genesis*, 206; Alter, *Genesis, Translation and Commentary*, 78; Speiser, *Genesis*, 129; Aalders, *Genesis*, II: 3; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 276f; Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 3; J. Kenneth Kuntz, *The Self Revelation of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967) 121. Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Day in Mamre, Night in Sodom* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 83. But v. Masashi Takahashi, “An Oriental’s Approach to the Problems of Angelology,” *ZAW* 78 (1966), who says that “immediately their identity is recognized by Abraham (346).”

¹⁰⁴Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 3.

¹⁰⁵“Qu’est-ce qu’il en est de Genèse 18?” *Lepoint théologique* 24 (1977): 76.

¹⁰⁶See Lindblom, “Theophanies in Holy Places,” 95; Kuntz, *Self Revelation of God*, 116.

the ground” before the men and said “If I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away.” וישתחו *Wayyištaḥû*, “and he bowed,” is the Hithpa’lêl of שָׁחָה *shāḥāh*, “to bow down.” This prostration can simply imply deference or homage (Abraham to the Hittites, Gen 23, 7.12) or worship (Isaac Gen 24, 26.48.52). The addition here, however, of אֶרֶץ *’āṣāh* “to the earth” “lends an elemental resonance to the obeisance,”¹⁰⁷ as in Ex 34, 8 (Moses to Yahweh). J. van Seters notes, “As if to strengthen this identity, he (the narrator) has Abraham do obeisance to the visitors in a manner befitting only a king or deity. This is certainly more than a show of politeness.”¹⁰⁸

This is further demonstrated by what follows: “If I have found favor in your eyes *māṣā’û ḥēn b’jā*.” *ḥēn*, “graciousness, favor,” “connotes God’s spirit of helpfulness.”¹⁰⁹ As Robert Ignatius Letellier notes: “The appearance of *ḥēn* in the context of 18,3 is an indicator of divine power at work. Why should Abraham use so weighted a word in welcoming an apparently ordinary visitor?...The verb ‘*br*’ to pass by’ is frequently used in connection with the appearance of YHWH and a special manifestation of grace, either by his presence or through the agency of his prophet”.¹¹⁰ Letellier thus sees this verb as a nexus linking Gen 18, Ex 33:19 and 2 Kings 4. “The analogy with Gen 18 is strong: YHWH is passing but is prevailed upon by his servant Abraham to accept hospitality and later blesses him with the promise of a son...The verb ‘*br*’ is an alert signal to YHWH’s transforming presence.”¹¹¹

In v 22, after Yahweh informs Abraham of his intentions for Sodom and Gomorrah, we read, “And the men turned from there and went on toward Sodom while the Lord was still standing before Yahweh.” Chapter 19 then begins: “The two angels came to Sodom in the evening.” This is important in that it establishes that only two of the men, now identified as angels, proceeded to Sodom and Gomorrah, the third man, Yahweh, remaining behind with Abraham. Thus, as Hamilton observes, “Ch. 19 suggests that the trio is really Yahweh and two of His messengers.”¹¹² Gerhard Von Radd notes also: “The most obvious answer (to the identity of the men) seems to be that Yahweh is one of the three men. This assumption would become certainty when in chs. 18:22 and 19:1, after Yahweh’s departure, the ‘two messengers’ come to Sodom.”¹¹³ It is clear that the three men here are Yahweh and two of his angels.¹¹⁴ Hamilton, in his *Commentary to the Book of Genesis*, argues, “This is the one theophany in the Abraham cycle in which Yahweh appears to Abraham with others at his side.”¹¹⁵

We thus have in Genesis 18 a very bold theophany narrative in which God himself is presented as a man who eats and rests. Letellier concludes:

YHWH appears here as a man...This is not to be confused with mere anthropomorphism. While God is seen as a man and speaks and eats like one, there is no attempt to depict the form of God or to describe his external appearance...It is the human appearance in the theophany that is essential, and there is consistency and cohesion in the OT in presenting these stories systematically. God wills to appear and does so in human shape.¹¹⁶

Hamori concludes, “There is no indication in the text...that it is intended metaphorically...In Genesis 18:1-15, Yahweh is presented in entirely realistic human form, but free from human flaws.”¹¹⁷ Even G. Ch. Aalders, in his *Bible Student’s Commentary* reluctantly admits:

¹⁰⁷Letellier, *DayinMamre* ,82.

¹⁰⁸J.vanSeters, *AbrahaminHistoryandTradition* (NewHaven/London,1975),212.

¹⁰⁹P.Heinisch, *TheologyoftheOldTestament* (StPaul,1955),92.

¹¹⁰Letellier, *DayinMamre* ,84f.

¹¹¹Letellier, *DayinMamre* ,85.

¹¹²Hamilton, *TheBookofGenesis* ,7.

¹¹³VonRadd, *Genesis,ACommentary* ,204. VonRaddcautionsusagainst ‘mixing’ “the sectioninch.19.1ff., whichderivesfroma differenttradition, withthis.” Thisisunnecessarilyhowever; thefinalredactorofthisnarrativecomplex, which “beginswithch.18and doesnotenduntilch.19.38” clearlyunderstoodthe beginningofch.19asacontinuationofchapter18’sconclusion. Ontheliterary relationbetweenchap.18and19seeHamori, “‘WhenGodsWereMen’,” 14-33; BrianDoyle, ‘Knock,Knock,Knockin’onSodom’s Door’: TheFunctionof חתך/תלך inGenesis18-19,” *JSOT* 28(2004):431-448; ThomasM.Bolin, “TheRoleofExchangeinAncient MediterraneanReligionandItsImplicationsforReadingGenesis18-19,” *JSOT* 29(2004):37-56; Alter, *Genesis, Translationand Commentary*,77,80; Speiser, *Genesis*,131,134,138;

¹¹⁴SeealsoAlter, *Genesis, TranslationandCommentary* 77; G.Ch.Aalders, *BibleStudent’s Commentary* ,3.

¹¹⁵Hamilton, *TheBookofGenesis* ,8.

¹¹⁶Letellier, *DayinMamre* ,39.

¹¹⁷“WhenGodsWereMen”, 43,72.

Undoubtedly we are presented with facts here that are beyond our comprehension. It is totally beyond our understanding that God Himself should appear with two of His holy angels in such realistic human form that they actually ate human food. But this is precisely what God tells us in His word...¹¹⁸

4.3. *The Mighty Man of Israel*

Yahweh is not only an *šman*, but a *gibbôr*, mighty man.¹¹⁹ Of particular significance is Zeph. 1:14. In order to properly appreciate this verse, however, anumber of text-critical issues need to be addressed.

- 1:14a. קרוב יום יהיה הגדול
 b. קרוב ומהר מאד
 c. קול יום יהיה מר
 d. צרח שם גבור

The KJV translates this verse:

- a. The great day of the Lord is near,
 b. It is near, and hasteth greatly,
 c. Even the voice of the day of the Lord:
 d. The mighty man shall cry there bitterly.

But this is not the best translation of a verse that has given translators much trouble.¹²⁰ Verse 14 contains four versets, only one of which has provoked no scholarly controversy.¹²¹ Versets 14c-d have probably suffered corruption.¹²² While all the Versions agree in their reading of the preceding line (14 a-b), they all disagree here.¹²³ The Hebrew presents its own difficulties. It reads literally, “The sound of the day of Yahweh is fierce; crying there (a/the) mighty man.” The adverb ‘there’ (*šām*, שם) is without a proper antecedent.¹²⁴ Many translators have therefore emended the verse to read “the day of Yahweh is swifter than a runner and faster than a mighty man/hero”¹²⁵; but such a large number of textual emendations is completely unwarranted and unsupported by the Ancient Versions.¹²⁶

A major stumbling block in translating this verset is the adjective *mar* מר, translated here as “fierce.” Two questions arise regarding this word: (1) what is its meaning and (2) does it belong at the end of v. 14c, or the beginning of v. 14d. In other words, does *mar*, whatever its meaning, modify “(the sound of) the day of Yahweh in v. 14c or the (battle cry of) the mighty man of v. 14b. A proper reading of the text requires appropriate answers to these questions.

In regards the meaning, it is clear from OT evidence that מר originates from the root מרר, meaning ‘bitter.’ Additionally, Laurence Kutler demonstrated in 1984, *pace* Dennis Pardee,¹²⁷ that it has the double meaning in Biblical Hebrew of “strong.”¹²⁸ Thus, Ball’s translation as ‘fierce’, connoting both bitterness and strength, seems appropriate.¹²⁹

A right answer to question two is harder to pin down. The Hebrew is ambiguous.¹³⁰ It can be read either as, “Hark!” (the sound of) the day of Yahweh is fierce; the mighty man cries there,” or “Hark! (the

¹¹⁸ Aalders, *Bible Student's Commentary*, 5.

¹¹⁹ See above, n. 79.

¹²⁰ John D. W. Watts, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 162.

¹²¹ Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of Zephaniah* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 116.

¹²² Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah* [New York: Doubleday, 1964], 89.

¹²³ LXX reads *phōnēh ēmeraskyrioupikrakaiskl ēra, tetaktaidynat ē*, “the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter and harsh, it is set up as strong.” The Vulgate reads *tribulabitur ibi fortis*, “the strong man will suffer tribulation there.” The Targum reads, “the sound of the day which is about to come from before Yahweh, in which one will be bitter and cry out, there the warriors are being killed.” See J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 182; Ivan Jay Ball, Jr., *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah* (Berkeley, California: BIBAL Press, 1988), 41.

¹²⁴ *The Interpreter's Bible* 6:1018.

¹²⁵ See also L. H. Brockington's variation, reading *g' dūd* “a band of raiders,” instead of *gibbôr*, “mighty man/hero” (*The Hebrew Text of the Old Testament* [London: Oxford University Press/Cambridge University Press, 1973], 262).

¹²⁶ Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 182; Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 89; Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 118.

¹²⁷ Dennis Pardee, “The Semitic Root *mrr* and the etymology of Ugaritic *mr(r)/brk*,” *UF* 10 (1978) 249-88.

¹²⁸ Laurence Kutler, “A ‘Strong’ Case for Hebrew *Mar*,” *UF* 16 (1984): 111-118.

¹²⁹ Ball, *A Rhetorical Study*, 79; Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 119.

¹³⁰ See Smith et al., *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 203.

sound of) the Day of Yahweh; the mighty man cries there fiercely.” While J.M.P. Smith found legitimacy in neither of our two options (therefore choosing to emend the text¹³²), I find both as legitimate possible readings.¹³³ The overall meaning of the text is not much affected by one’s choice here; in other words, whether it is the (sound of) the Day of Yahweh that is fierce, or the cry of a/the mighty man, the sense of the imminence and ‘terror’ of that day, one of the main themes of this text, is preserved.

A possible key to unraveling the meaning of this text may be in the misplaced adverb שם. As an adverb of place, its usual function, שם is conspicuously out of place; there is no antecedent here.¹³⁴ It has been noted, however, that, on occasion, the adverb can have a temporal sense, meaning “then.”¹³⁵ Read so here, we get, lit., “(a/the) mighty man cried then aloud,” with the Day of Yahweh as the antecedent; thus, as Ben Zvi translates, “at that time (Day of Yahweh) a warrior cries out.”¹³⁶ This is certainly a possible reading of the text.¹³⁷ But it doesn’t quite remove all of the difficulties. The syntax is still awkward. Even with the stylistic license of Biblical Hebrew poetry, we would not expect the circumstantial adverb (in this case “then” or “at that time”) to split the verb and the subject (the Hebrew reads literally, צרה שם גבור, “cries aloud then a/the mighty man). As the *Interpreter’s Bible* noted, “the order of the words is unusual, and not to say wrong.”¹³⁸ This difficulty is only increased if we read, as many do, *mar* at the beginning of v. 14b, instead of the end of 14c. We thus get, “Fiercely cries aloud then a/the mighty man.” שם read as the adverb *šām*, simply does not fit here.

A possible, and in our opinion quite attractive solution was offered by Ivan Jay Ball, Jr. in his doctoral thesis on Zephania in 1972. Ball took שם, not as an adverb, but as an adjective meaning “appalling” from the root שׁמם.¹³⁹ He was encouraged in this reading by the analogy with the preceding adjective מר (“fierce”) which derived from the root מרר. Reading this latter at the beginning of v. 14d instead of the end of v. 14c, Ball obtained the following bicolon:

מר צרה
שם גבור

Which can be read:

Fierce is he who cries aloud,¹⁴⁰
Appalling is the mighty man.

This suggestion sufficiently removes the syntactical difficulties of the verset and is perfectly consistent with the (con)text. Additionally, we have the most important rhetorical feature of Biblical poetry: parallelism. Thus, the (near) best translation of Zephaniah 1:14 seems to be:

1:14a: The great Day of Yahweh is near,
b Hastening most quickly.¹⁴¹

¹³¹ The Hebrew *qôl*, while generally meaning “sound” or “voice,” as all the Versions read it here, when it occurs at the beginning of a clause and followed by a genitive may function as an exclamatory, ‘Hark!’ (See Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 118; Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 89). Ben Zvi is probably correct in reading it as a *double entendre* here, conveying both meanings (Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 119).

¹³² Smith *et al*, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary*, 203f. Smith argued, “If bitter be taken with the first half of the line, it forms an unsuitable predicate to ‘sound,’ and when treated as predicate to ‘day,’ the resulting sentence ‘the day of Yahweh is bitter’ furnishes an inappropriate continuation of the participle ‘Hark’; if ‘bitter’ be connected with the second half of the line, the rhythmical balance of the line is disturbed.” He therefore dropped the verb of 14d, *soreah*, “to cry aloud,” emending the Hebrew to read, “Nea rat hand is Yahweh’s bitter day, hastening faster than a warrior.”

¹³³ No compelling reason exists to emend the text to have come forth, with the one possible exception: the reading of שם. See below.

¹³⁴ *Interpreter’s Bible* 6:1018. Smith *et al*, *Critical And Exegetical Commentary*, 203f.

¹³⁵ Prov. 8:27; Job 35:12.

¹³⁶ Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 120f.

¹³⁷ Smith’s objection that such a meaning “is not well established” lacks all force (*Critical And Exegetical Commentary*, 203). Such a use in Biblical poetry (as this text is) is sufficiently established to justify reading so here. See Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 89; Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 120f.

¹³⁸ Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 120f.

¹³⁹ *The Interpreter’s Bible* 6:1018; Smith *et al*, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary* 203f noted also, “the order of the words in the latter part of the line is wholly abnormal.”

¹⁴⁰ Ball, *A Rhetorical Study*, 42.

¹⁴¹ Ball takes שׁמם, a qal participle meaning “crying aloud” or, as we will see later, “roaring a battle cry,” as a substantive meaning “he who shouts a battle cry.” Ball, *A Rhetorical Study*, 79.

c Hark! (The sound of) the Day of Yahweh.
d Fierce is he who shouts a battle cry.
Appalling is a/the mighty man.

We now come to the most important question regarding this text: who is the unidentified *gibbôr* or “mighty man” spoken of here? Is it “a mighty man,” i.e. men in general at that time, or “the mighty man,” a particular mighty man? The Hebrew is ambiguous because *gibbôr* is non-determined (lacks the definite article) here. But in poetic biblical Hebrew the definite article is frequently absent from definite nouns.¹⁴² Thus, מלכי־ארץ (Ps. 2:2) is “the kings of the earth,” even though both nouns lack the article (ה, *ha*). Most translators therefore render *gibbôr* here as “the mighty man” or “the warrior.”¹⁴³ Who then is “the mighty man”? Ball reads *gibbôr* as a divine title, thus his translation, “Fierce is He who shouts a battle cry; appalling is the Mighty One.”¹⁴⁴ The “mighty man” would then be God. Ball is not alone in this reading. John D. W. Watts translated the text:

The great day of the Lord is near.
The great Soldier¹⁴⁵ himself is near.
The noise of the day of the Lord is overpowering
Shouting: See the Warrior!

He explains: “The Day is one of battle and the Lord’s appearance on the field will decide the outcome.”¹⁴⁶ Ball and Watts are among a long list of commentators who see in this *gibbôr* a reference to God.¹⁴⁷ Textual evidence confirms this reading. The prophet Zephaniah explicitly refers to God as a *gibbôr* later in 3:17 in a passage linked to 1:14 by its description of the Day of Yahweh¹⁴⁸:

3:16: On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem
Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.
3:17: Yahweh, your God, is in your midst
A Mighty Man (*gibbôr*) who saves (יְשִׁיעַ, *yôšîʿ*).¹⁴⁹

It is appropriate to read 1:14 in the light of 3:17¹⁵⁰ as is further supported by the verb used in 1:14d, צרה (“to cry aloud”). This rare word occurs only one other time in the OT. It appears in *hiphil* form in Isa. 42:13, where Yahweh as the subject is again called *gibbôr*.

Yahweh as a mighty man (*gibbôr*) goes forth,
As a man of wars (*ʾiṣh milhāmôt*) he stirs up His fury
With zeal He shouts a war cry
With anger He roars a battle cry (*yaśrîʾh*, יַצְרִיחַ)
Against His enemies He shows Himself a mighty man (*yithgabbar*, יִתְגַּבֵּר).¹⁵¹

¹⁴¹ We are taking *qārôb* as an infinitive absolute of קָרַב in the qal pattern, and *mahēr* as an infinitive absolute of מָהַר in the piel pattern used adverbially. See Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study* 117f. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 182. We see no justification for taking *haggāḏôl* in 14a as a divine title with Ball, *ARhetoricalStudy* 78 or *mahēr* in 14b as “(Divine) Soldier” with Watts (*The Book of*, 162). See Hubert Irsigler, *Gottesgericht und Jahwetag* (Eos Verlag, 1977), 49ff.

¹⁴² Judg 5:4, Ps 2:2; V. C. L. Seow, *A Grammar For Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 157.

¹⁴³ Paul R. House, *Zephaniah, A Prophetic Drama* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1988), 120; Watts, *The Book of*, 161; Smith *et al*, 203; *Interpreter’s Bible*, 6:1018; Both the *KJV* and the *NOAB* translate the term as a definite noun. On the other hand, Berlin (*Zephaniah*, 85) and Roberts (*Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 181) read an indefinite noun.

¹⁴⁴ Ball, *ARhetoricalStudy*, 42.

¹⁴⁵ Watts understood *mahēr* inv. 14b as ‘soldier,’ a meaning clearly attested in other Semitic languages. Watts, *The Book of*, 162.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Gillis Gerleman, *Zephania, Textkritisch und Literarisch Untersucht* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1942), 19f; D. Deden, *De Kleine Profeten* (Roermond-Maaseil: J. J. Romen & Zonen, 1953/56), 283; Augustine George, *Michee, Sophonie, Nahum*, in *La Sainte Bible* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1958), 64; Rolf Freiherr Ungern-Sternberg and Helmut Lamparter, *Der Tag des Gerichtes Gottes: Die Propheten Habakkuk, Zephania, Jona, Nahum* (Stuttgart: Calver Verlag, 1960), 83.96.98; Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 121. See also Irsigler’s discussion, *Gottesgericht und Jahwetag*, 52ff.s

¹⁴⁸ Ball, *ARhetoricalStudy*, 267.

¹⁴⁹ For discussion of this verse see below.

¹⁵⁰ As does Ball (*ARhetoricalStudy*, 79); Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 120.

¹⁵¹ On this passage v. Julian Morgenstern, “Isaiah 42:10-13,” in *To Do & To Teach, Essays in Honor of Charles Lynn Poynter* (Lexington: The College of the Bible, 1953), 27-38; David Noel Freedman, “Isaiah 42, 13” *CBQ* 30 (1968): 225-6; Kathryn Pfister Darr, “Like Warrior, Like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42:10-17,” *CBQ* 49 (1987): 560-571.

The joint occurrence of צרה and גבור, found only here and in Zephaniah 1:14, confirms that the two passages are to be read in light of each other¹⁵²; he who “utters a battle cry” in Zephaniah 1:14 is He Who utters a battle cry in Isa. 42:13. J.J.M. Roberts notes: “The use of the verb *sh* in Isa. 42:13 suggests that it designates the scream or battle cry of the warrior who has worked himself up in a killing rage.”¹⁵³ Ehud Ben Zvi concludes, “By the end of the poetic line (Zeph. 1:14) it is clear that YHWH is the warrior whose shouting is the source of the fierce sound of the [Day of Yahweh], and that YHWH is the one who brings distress in such a day.”¹⁵⁴ The most accurate reading of our passage is thus:

- 1:14a: The great Day of Yahweh is near,
- b Hastening most quickly
- c Hark! (The sound of) the Day of Yahweh.
- d Fierce is He who shouts a battle cry.
- e. Appalling is The Mighty Man.

God will thus appear on that Day as a mighty man, shouting a war cry, about to unleash a ravaging fury on His enemies, that is, the enemies of Jerusalem. As for Jerusalem, God will on that Day be a “mighty man who saves *gibbôryôšî*” גבור ישיע, Zeph. 3:17. This latter passage is construed as a response to the plea of Jeremiah (14:7-9):

- 7. Though our iniquities testify against us
Yahweh, act for the sake of your name
For our backslidings are many
Against you we have sinned
- 8. The Hope of Israel
Its savior in the time of trouble
Why will you become like a sojourner in the land
And like a traveler turned aside to lodge?
- 9. Why will you become like a helpless man(*’išnidh ām*)
like a mighty man unable to save(*gibbôrl ō’yûk_āl ‘hōšî^a*)?
But you are in our midst, Yahweh
And your name upon us is called
Do not leave us!

Here Israel, through Jeremiah, confesses their sins and apostasy and pleas for deliverance and Yahweh’s continued presence. Their appeal is that Yahweh should save Israel for His own name’s sake, in spite of Israel’s backsliding, because He has staked His honor on the election of Israel.¹⁵⁵ Zion is His land, chosen to be His dwelling-place. Yet it is devastated by drought and Israel is in a desperate condition of want and distress.¹⁵⁶ The prophet asks rhetorically, Why does Yahweh act like a sojourner passing through a foreign land, lodging for only a night then proceeding? This is Your land! Then the prophet asks: “Why behave like a helpless man(*’išnidh ām*)?” *’išnidh ām* is a contradiction in terms, as is a “mighty man who cannot save (*gibbôrl ō’yûk_āl ‘hōšî^a*)”. An *’iš* / *gibbôr* by definition can save.¹⁵⁷ Yahweh is an acknowledged *’iš* and *gibbôr* (Jer. 20:11). Why then behave thus, acting helpless and unable to save His land/people, all while “in our midst (v.9)” This is the context in which Zeph. 3:17 should be read.¹⁵⁸ The prophet Zephaniah responds, “Yahweh, your God, *is* in your midst a mighty man who saves *gibbôryôšî*”.

¹⁵²Gerleman, *Zephania*, 19; James Mullenburg, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 472; Ball, *A Rhetorical Study*, 79f; Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 120. Cf. Irsigler, *Gottesgericht und Jahwetag*, 52f.

¹⁵³Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 183.

¹⁵⁴Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 121.

¹⁵⁵Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*. The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 702).

¹⁵⁶William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1975) 1 :320.

¹⁵⁷William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah I* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 433.

¹⁵⁸Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 249.

4.4. 'God is Not A Man'?

The God of the Hebrew prophets was therefore a man, a mighty man. At least eleven times in the HB and two further times in the DSS he is referred to as such.¹⁵⁹ These numbers alone would seem to make the case definitive. Yet as any statistician knows, numbers don't tell the whole story. There are three verses in the whole of the biblical canon that, on the surface at least, appear as explicit in their denial of god's divine humanity as the above verses appear as explicit in their affirmation of the same: Num. 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Hos. 11:9. It is one or all of these three verses that are routinely relied on as the Bible's definitive statement about God, despite the fact that they are dwarfed by the others in terms of numbers and narrative elaboration. But the use of these verses individually or collectively to demonstrate that the biblical deity is non-anthropomorphic is clearly a parade example of non-contextual exegesis and even dogmatic eisegesis. A close reading of these Hebrew passages do not support the use that has been made of them; the passages do not contradict the more numerous affirmations that God is a man. The two critical issues in understanding these verses is the Hebrew syntax and the narrative context.

Num. 23:19a לא איש אל ויכזב
b ו בן־דאם ויתנחם

The KJV of this verse reads, "God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that he should repent." Fidelity to the Hebrew syntax requires a different translation, however. Both versets are better translated as relative clauses. The wāw (ו) followed by a verb reflected for number and gender (יכזב, יתנחם) can have the sense of a relative particle "that/who."¹⁶⁰ The better translation is therefore, "God is not a man *who* lies, nor a son of man *who* repents." This small syntactical clarification produces a significant change in meaning. Num. 23:19 is not an absolute denial that God is a man; it only denies that God is a man who lies or repents. Similar is the statement, "I, True Islam, am not a man who smokes." I am denying in this statement not my manhood or humanity, but that I smoke.

The larger context confirms this reading. As commentators have pointed out, the context of this verse is defined by the second half of verset b, the denial of divine repentance. On the surface this seems absolute: the God of Israel does not repent. However, as R.W.L. Moberly has pointed out,¹⁶¹ divine repentance is a theological axiom of the Hebrew Bible, affirmed 27 times.¹⁶² God does *niham*, repent, in response to humans turning from evil. This willingness on God's part to "change his mind" on behalf of human repentance is a central principle of his relationship with man in general and Israel in particular. It implies that this relationship is genuine and responsive, in which what people do and how they relate to God matters to God.¹⁶³ Now God's repenting, *niham*, is different from man's repenting, *šûb*. Human *šûb* involves *kizzēb*, deception, and *šeqer*, "speaking falsely," implying that people do not live up to their promises.¹⁶⁴ In contrast, God does not disappoint. But God reserves the freedom to hold to a decree of his own issuance, or reverse that decree according to man's response. Thus, 1 Sam 15:29, "He is not a man who repents" is sandwiched between 1 Sam 15:11 and 35, both of which declare that Yahweh does repent. The particular context of Num. 23:19 is God's resolve to bless Israel despite the efforts of Balak to extract a curse on Israel from the seer-prophet Balaam; the particular context of 1 Sam 15:29 is God's resolve to give the kingdom of Israel to David and his descendents unconditionally, even when they disobey him.¹⁶⁵

The unchangeability of God assures human beings that they are not in the hands of caprice or irresponsible power which often characterizes the conduct of humankind. It is reflected in Yahweh's faithfulness to Israel. At the same time, the changeability of God reveals God in vital relationships with his people. Israel was not in the hands of iron fate or a predetermined order. God should not be equated with "The Absolute" of

¹⁵⁹ See above n. 70.

¹⁶⁰ Seow, *AGrammar*, 285.

¹⁶¹ "God is Not a Human That He Should Repent' (Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29)," in Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (eds.), *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) 112-123.

¹⁶² 1 Sam 15:11, 35; 2 Sam 24:16; Jer 18:8, 10; 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10; Jon 3:9, 10; 4:2.

¹⁶³ Moberly, "God is Not a Human," 112-115.

¹⁶⁴ Moberly, "God is Not a Human," 116-117.

¹⁶⁵ See Terence E. Fretheim, "Divine Knowledge, Divine Constancy, and the Rejection of Saul's Kingship," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 595-602.

philosophical theology, if this describes God as existing in isolation from human beings and as in no way effected by mankind's experiences.¹⁶⁶

Thus, as Moberly rightly notes, "It is against this background of the consistent depiction of Yahweh as 'repenting that one must set those passages which deny that Yahweh 'repents'."¹⁶⁷ If the seemingly categorical denial in the second half of the versets in Num 23:19 that God repents is to be qualified by the repeated affirmations that God does repent, the statement in the first half of the verset that "God is not a man..." must also be qualified by the repeated affirmations that God is a man.

The second qualification is that God "is not a human being(*lō' 'iṣ/ben-' ādām*, Num 23:19a; *lō' 'ādām*, 1 Sam 15:29). In neither passage is this some kind of principle in its own right, but each time it introduces the notion of repenting as something characteristic of humanity, and it is from this that God is distanced...¹⁶⁸

The third passage, Hos. 11:9, further confirms that God's divine humanity is not here denied categorically.

I will not execute My wrath
I will not again destroy Ephraim,
for I am God and not man(*כי אל אני ולא אִישׁ*),
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.

Here God's 'otherness' is His ability to rise above the emotion of his own hurt and not destroy Ephraim, as a jealous husband would have done.¹⁶⁹ As E. Lab. Cherbonnier well pointed in his classic article, "The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism":

It is sometimes held that this biblical anthropomorphism is only a manner of speaking, a mere symbol for the hidden, 'wholly other' God who defies all attempts to describe him. A few standard passages are regularly adduced as evidence that the Bible 'at its best' abandons anthropomorphism. Modern scholarship, however, by restoring these passages to their context and so restoring their original meaning, reverses such an interpretation...Hosea 11:9: 'For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst.' Here apparently, God is contrasted with man; anthropomorphism is repudiated. The context, however, establishes the contrary. Indeed, Hosea is one of the most daringly anthropomorphic authors of the Bible. He attributes to God Himself the feelings and emotions of the husband whose wife has 'played the harlot.' The contrast between God and man concerns their respective ways of dealing with the situation. Instead of destroying Israel for her faithlessness, as might be expected of man, God is not vindictive. He has resources of mercy and forgiveness for the softening of Israel's heart. This difference between God and man is not a difference 'in principle.' It is merely 'de facto'-a difference which God intends to overcome.¹⁷⁰

See also Ulrich Mauser, who poignantly notes:

The words "I am God and not man" in (Hos. 11:9) have been adduced frequently to justify the contention that, in spite of all their anthropomorphic language, the Old Testament prophets are fully aware of the spiritual nature of God. But nothing could be further from the truth...the godness of God is not denial of his anthropomorphous nature, but the qualitative superiority of God over man which consists in God's will not to fall victim to his wrath but to forgive even in a situation in which man would have lost all sympathy and patience.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ John T. Willis, "The 'Repentance' of God in the Book of Samuel, Jeremiah, and Jonah," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 16(1994): 156-175(162).

¹⁶⁷ Moberly, "God is Not a Human," 115.

¹⁶⁸ Moberly, "God is Not a Human," 117.

¹⁶⁹ Gary Alan Long, "Dead or Alive: Literality and God - Metaphors in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of the Academy of Religion* 62 (1994): 521.

¹⁷⁰ E. L. Cherbonnier, "The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism," *Harvard Theological Review* 55:1962, 187-8.

¹⁷¹ "Image of God and Incarnation," *Interpretation* 24(1970): 348.

We know in fact that this is the correct reading of Hosea, because it is in Hosea that God instructs Israel to no longer call Him Baal (Lord/husband), but call Him My Man (*ʾîš*).

The point in these three passages is clearly not that God is not a man, but that God is not *like* men. As Job recognized, “For He is not a man *like me* that I might answer Him כִּי-לֹא-אִישׁ כַּמֶּנִּי אֶעֱנֶנּוּ” (9:32). That a man could deny being a man due to certain qualities that he lacks or possesses in abundance is proved by Prov. 30:1-2, where ‘the man *הַגִּבֹּר*, *haggeber*’ Agur declares in a moment of self-depreciation, “I am a beast, not a man *אִישׁ מֵאִישׁ כִּי בַעַר אֲכֹנִי מֵאִישׁ*”. In Hosea God is thus contrasted with man in that He is full of compassion. In Num 23 and I Sam 15 on the other hand, God “is not a man” in the specific sense that He does not lie (v19) or break His promises as man is prone to do. “Has He promised and will He not do it? Has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it?” Isaiah 46:5,9 contrasts God with the pagan’s idols. “To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare Me, that we may be alike?...For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.” Cherbonnier again notes:

Logically, He (God of the Bible) has more in common with these Olympian deities than with Plato’s ‘Being’ or Aristotle’s ‘Unmoved Mover.’ The difference between Yahweh and Zeus is not logical or formal, but factual and ‘existential.’ The prophets do not charge the pagan deities with being anthropomorphic, but with being insufficiently anthropomorphic. At their best, they are counterfeit persons. At their worst, they are frankly impersonal.

...(Is 46:5) contrasts the mighty acts of Yahweh with the impotence of every false god: “They lift it upon their shoulders, they carry it;...it cannot move from its place, ...it does not answer” (v. 7). The true God, however, does move and speak; he announces his purpose and brings it to pass (v. 11).

The intent of such passages is to distinguish Yahweh from idols by precisely these anthropomorphic activities: “They have mouths, but don’t speak; eyes, but don’t see; they have ears, but do not hear; nose, but do not smell” (Ps. 115:5,6). Pagan gods are contemptible because of their impotence. They cannot even do the things man can do, whereas Yahweh does these things *par excellence*.¹⁷²

In Hosea, Numbers and I Samuel God exalts Himself above man by contrasting His ‘activity’ from that of man. God’s actions are predicated upon higher principles than those on which man’s are predicated- jealousy, for example. On the other hand, God exalts Himself over the idols by contrasting His ability to perform characteristically human acts- seeing with eyes, hearing with ears, etc- to the idols who, though possessing a human shape, can not perform those human deeds. God does them *par excellence*. This is the Divine Paradox, the Mystery of God; an anthropomorphic deity who is nonetheless utterly different from man- not substantially but qualitatively. Thus, K. Van Der Toorn in the ***Dictionary of Deities and Demons of the Bible*** (2001) observes:

The Israelite concept of God shares many traits with the beliefs of its neighbors. The most fundamental correspondence concerns the anthropomorphic nature ascribed to God. God’s anthropomorphism is external...as well as internal...Over against the anthropomorphism of God found in the Hebrew Bible, there are those texts that stress the difference between God’s divinity and man’s humanity (Num. 23:19, Hos. 11:9)... A closer look at these examples shows that the opposition does not invalidate the idea of divine anthropomorphism. God’s qualities are human qualities, yet purified from imperfection and amplified to superhuman dimensions. Sincerity and reliability are human virtues- even if only God is wholly sincere and reliable. Strength, too, is not the exclusive prerogative of God; he is merely incomparably stronger than humans or animals.

In view of the passages dwelling upon the contrast between God and man, the thesis of God’s anthropomorphism should be modified in this sense that God is more than human. Though man has been created in the image of God...there is a huge difference of degree- yet not of nature.¹⁷³

The biblical deity is anthropomorphic, but transcendentally so:

Yahweh has a body, clearly anthropomorphic, but too holy for human eyes...Like the bodies of Marduk, Ninurta, and Aten, Yahweh’s body was believed to be incommensurate with mundane human existence: it has a different degree of being than human bodies...God’s sublimity is expressed by his extreme holy and dangerous presence, not by his bodily form *per se*. It is a transcendent anthropomorphism not in its

¹⁷² Cherbonnier, “Logic,” 192.

¹⁷³ K. VanDerToorn, “God(1),” in **DDD**, 361ff.

form but its effect, approachable only by the most holy, and absent in the cult...The body of God was defined in Israelite culture as both like and unlike that of humans.”¹⁷⁴

5. *The God of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah*

Gerald R. Hawting, in taking up and elaborating upon John Wansbrough's insistence that emergent Islam be seen as a continuation of the Near Eastern Semitic monotheistic tradition,¹⁷⁵ makes an observation of great importance:

That Islam is indeed related to Judaism and Christianity as part of the Middle Eastern, Abrahamic or Semitic tradition of monotheism seems so obvious and is so often said that it might be wondered why it was thought necessary to repeat it. The reason is that although it is often said, acceptance of Islam as a representative of the monotheist religious tradition *is not always accompanied by willingness to think through the implications of the statement* (emphasis added).¹⁷⁶

While both Muslim tradition and Western scholarship articulate a recognition of Islam's place within the Semitic monotheistic tradition, not only is there often an unwillingness to embrace the implications of this recognition, but there is also in practice the tendency to *distance* Islam from that tradition.¹⁷⁷ This is particularly the case regarding the Islamic *Gotteslehre* (doctrine of God). Islam's supposedly invisible and non-theophanous deity stands in stark contrast to not only the ancient Near Eastern religious tradition, but to the Semitic monotheistic tradition in particular; as we have seen, the latter's God is anthropomorphic and routinely theophanous.¹⁷⁸ The disparity becomes more acute when one considers the insistence, by Islamic tradition and Western scholarship, that the deity is the same in the three monotheistic traditions: “The monotheists not only worship one God; he is the same god for all. Whether called Yahweh or Elohim, God the Father or Allah, it is the selfsame deity who created the world out of nothing.”¹⁷⁹ This insistence is of course qur'anic.¹⁸⁰ Again, this only makes the disparity the more acute. The biblical/extra-biblical Yahweh-Elohim, who is visible and theophanous, is incongruous with the (ontologically) invisible¹⁸¹ and non-theophanous Allah of Muslim tradition. While the God of contemporary popular Islam is invisible, incorporeal, and utterly abstract, the God of the classical Arabic sources, including the Qur'an and Sunnah, is, as would be expected from its identity with the biblical deity, anthropomorphic and visible. Space will not allow a thorough discussion of the Islamic *Gotteslehre*; such a discussion is in process of being written now. Here, however, I want to touch on only a few points critical to that discussion.

The Qur'an and Sunnah describe Allah anthropomorphically.¹⁸² Allah is a corporeal person (*shakhs*)¹⁸³ with a most beautiful, anthropomorphic form (*sūra*),¹⁸⁴ which the prophet did see in a vision.¹⁸⁵ Modern

¹⁷⁴ Hengel, “Aniconism and Anthropomorphism,” 223, 228..

¹⁷⁵ See especially his *The Sectarial Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

¹⁷⁶ G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) xi-xii.

¹⁷⁷ See Gerald Hawting, “John Wansbrough, Islam, and monotheism,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9 (1997), special issue, *Islamic Origins Reconsidered: John Wansbrough and the Study of Early Islam*, ed. Herbert Berg, 23-38; Chase F. Robinson, “Reconstructing Early Islam: Truth and Consequences,” in Herbert Berg (ed.), *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 102-134.

¹⁷⁸ See above.

¹⁷⁹ F.E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004) 1. See also Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994) xviii: “The Koran, the Hadith, and the whole Islamic tradition maintain that the God of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims is a single God.”

¹⁸⁰ See 29:46; 42:14, 2:130-136

¹⁸¹ Murata and Chittick, *Vision*, 47, clarify that, according to their reading, “when the Koran speaks about the ‘unseen,’ it does not seem to mean that which our eyes do not reach in practice, but rather that which our eyes do not reach in principle...God and the angels are invisible (79, 88).”

¹⁸² On Islamic anthropomorphism, its sources, history and influences, see: Richard C. Martin, *The Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) (hereafter *EQ*), s.v. “Anthropomorphism,” 1: 106ff; Gerhard Böwering, *EQ*, s.v. “God and His Attributes,” 2: 316-331; Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (hereafter *TG*), 6 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), particularly vol. 4.; idem, “Tashbih wa-Tanzih,” *EP* 10: 341-344; idem, “The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam,” The University Lecture in Religion at Arizona State University, March 3, 1988 (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1988); Daniel Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme: les anthropomorphismes de la sunna et leur interprétation par les théologiens* (Paris: Patrimoine, 1997); Claude Gilliot, “Muqātil, Grand Exégète, Traditionniste Et Théologien Maudit,” *Journal Asiatique* 179 (1991): 39-84; *EI*, s.v. “Tashbih,” by R. Strothmann, 4: 685f; Allard, Michel, *Le problème des attributs divins dans la doctrine d'al-As'arī et de ses premiers grands disciples*. (Beyrouth, Impr. catholique; 1965); Helmut Ritter, *Das Meer Der Seele* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), 445-503 (=Helmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World and God in the*

readers, Muslim and non-Muslim, prefer to read this anthropomorphism metaphorically. But this is not how early Sunni orthodoxy read it,¹⁸⁶ and it is probably not how Muhammad intended it.¹⁸⁷ Daud Rahbar correctly draws attention to “the difference between Hellenized Islamic theology...and the simple Semitic atmosphere of the world-view of the Qur’an” and notes further:

The concept of the Absolute (*Mullaq*) was introduced into Islamic thought as soon as the first translations of Greek works into Arabic were sponsored by the Caliph Ma'mun at his *Bayt al Hikma*...(T)he Muslim idea of transcendence was founded on Platonic elements of Greek thought.¹⁸⁸

The Islamic doctrine of divine transcendence, before which even Western scholars are humbled,¹⁸⁹ is the product of later theological development and Hellenization.¹⁹⁰ This is not to say that Islamic scholars of all eras did not affirm God’s distinction from and exaltation far above his creation; they most certainly did. Muslim theologians of all eras and persuasions were unanimous in regarding *tashbīh*, that is to say, “likening God to creation,” as condemnable. But the rejection of *tashbīh* is not *ipso facto* a rejection of divine anthropomorphism; some of Islam’s, we would say “crudest” anthropomorphists, have been adamant against *tashbīh* as the “transcendentalists,” (*munazzihūn*).¹⁹¹ The verbal form *sh-b-h* means literally “to liken (s.o. or .s.t. to s.o./t. else),” thus *shibh* “similar to,” *shabah* “likeness, resemblance,” and *tashbīh* “assimilation/making similar.” This term is not used in the Qur’an except once, in reference to the death of Jesus (4:157).

At the heart of this semantic issue is the nature and degree of the “likeness” posited or prohibited: absolute likeness vs. only relative likeness. Thus, Taqī al-Dīn b. Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) argued that the term *tashbīh* can denote a proper degree of likeness between Creator and created (i.e. relative likeness), and it can also denote an improper degree of similarity (absolute likeness) whose disallowance is mandatory.¹⁹² This nuance is most clearly articulated by the Ḥanfī *qāḍī* ‘Alī b. ‘Alī b. Abī al ‘Izz (d. 792/1390) in his

Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār, trns and ed. John O’Kane and Bernd Radtke (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 448-519; Kees Wagtenonk, “Images in Islam: Discussion of a Paradox” in *Effigies Dei*, ed. Dirk van Der Plas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987) 112-129; J.M.S. Baljon, “Qur’anic Anthropomorphisms,” *Islamic Studies* 27 (1988): 119-127; W. Montgomery Watt, “Some Muslim Discussions of Anthropomorphism” and “Created in His Image: A Study in Islamic Theology,” in his *Early Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 86-93, 94-100; and Binyamin Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur’an in the Theology of Al-Qasim Ibn Ibrahim* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); idem, *Al-Kāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God’s Existence* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 25ff; J. Windrow Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology* 2 vols. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), 1.2:27-47; Merlin Swartz in *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī’s Kitāb Akhbār as-Ṣifāt, a Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with Translation, Introduction and Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

¹⁸³ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, li’ān, 17; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, IV, 248; Nisā’ī, *nikāḥ*, 37, 3. It is report from the Prophet on the authority of al-Mughīra b. Shu’ba: “No *shakhṣ* is more jealous than God; no *shakhṣ* is more pleased to grant pardon than He; and no *shakhṣ* loves praiseworthy conduct more than He.” The term *shakhṣ* connotes “the bodily or corporeal form or figure or substance of a man”. See Lane, *Arabic Lexicon*, 2:1517.

¹⁸⁴ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, isti’lḥān, 1; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, birra, 115; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* II: 244, 251, 315, etc. (God created Adam according to His *ṣūra*); Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, adḥān, 129; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, imān, 299; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, XIII:304 (God appears on the Day of Judgment in a form, *ṣūra*, other than His [own] form); Tirmidhī, *Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 9: 106ff, #3288; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 5:243 (God appeared to the Prophet in His “most beautiful form” [*fī aḥsanī ṣūratih*]).

¹⁸⁵ See sources and discussion in Wesley Williams, “*Ra’aytu rabbī*: Muḥammad’s Vision of God and its Place in the Development of Muslim Orthodoxy.”

¹⁸⁶ See especially Williams, “Aspects of the Creed,” *op. cit.*

¹⁸⁷ Gimaret, *Dieu à l’image de l’homme*, 23f.

¹⁸⁸ Daud Rahbar, “Relation of Muslim Theology to the Qur’an” *The Muslim World*, 51:1 (1961): 449. See also Fazlur Rahman, “The Qur’anic Concept of God, the Universe and Man,” *Islamic Studies*, 6:1 (1967): 2: “It has been generally held that the God of Islam is uncompromisingly transcendent and that this is shown by the tremendous emphasis Islam puts on the unity of God, His majesty, awesomeness, etc. This picture, however, DOES NOT EMERGE FROM THE QUR’AN (emphasis mine) BUT FROM LATER THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN ISLAM.”

¹⁸⁹ William A. Graham, “Transcendence in Islam,” in Edwin Dowdy (ed.), *Ways of Transcendence; Insights From Major Religions and Modern Thought* (Bedford Park, South Australia: Australian Association 1982) 7-23; Samuel M. Zwemer, “The Allah of Islam and the God of Jesus Christ,” *Theology Today* 3 (1946): 64-77; H.U. Weitbrecht Stanton, *The Teaching of the Qur’an* (London: Central Board of Missions and Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919): 35. See also W.M. Watt’s comments (“Some Muslim Discussions,” 87): “We in the West tend to speak of Islam as stressing the transcendence of God, but it has to be remembered that, while for the West the chief aspect of transcendence is probably God’s might and majesty, for Islam it is rather His otherness from His creatures. This aspect is present in the Old Testament...but in the Muslim outlook its relative importance is greater.”

¹⁹⁰ See above, n.8.

¹⁹¹ See below.

¹⁹² Ibn Taymiyya *Dar’ ta’arūḍ al-aql wa al-naql*, 10 vols. ed. Muḥammad Rashād Salīm (Riyāḍ, 1979), 1:115f, 248f. V. also Sherman Jackson’s discussion, “Ibn Taymiyyah on Trial in Damascus,” *JSS* 39 (1994): 41-84, esp. 51ff.

Sharh al-‘aqida al-Ṭahāwīya. Ibn Abī al ‘Izz begins by noting that the term *tashbīh* had become with the people “rather vague (*lafẓ mujmal*).”¹⁹³ He too suggests that there is an improper *tashbīh*, prohibited by Qur’ān, wherein an identity is posited between Creator and created, and a proper *tashbīh* wherein only a general or limited correspondence is posited. Whoever denies the latter is as guilty as he who affirms the former: “It is clear...that the Creator and the created are similar in some respects and differ in others (*ittiḥāqhumā min wajhi wa ikhtilāfuhumā min wajh*). And whoever denies what is common between them is a negator and is surely mistaken. On the other hand, whoever makes them homogeneous (*mutamāthilayni*) is a *mushabbih* and is equally mistaken. And Allah knows best. That is because, even though they are called by the same name, they are not identical (*mā ittafaqā fīhi*).”¹⁹⁴

Ibn Abī al ‘Izz demonstrates this correspondence by citing Qur’ānic verses wherein man is called by the names of God (e.g. 30:19, *ḥayy*; 51:28, *‘alīm*, ect.). He argues that these are not mere homonyms, such as *mushtarī* (which means both buyer and the planet Jupiter), similar in name only; the attributes of God and man share a common element denoted by the term.¹⁹⁵ They differ in that God’s are attributes of perfection (*Ṣiḡāt al-Kamāl*), whereas man’s comprise imperfections.¹⁹⁶

It is necessary to explore this argument deeper because it is in this author’s opinion crucial to understanding the whole “anthropomorphism” debate. For, though the above arguments come from later scholars, the sources strongly suggest that the same logic was employed by the early traditionalist/Sunni scholars as well. As noted above, *tashbīh* is not used in the Qur’an in reference to God. Instead, the pivotal verse wherein God’s otherness is most forcefully and (it would seem) clearly articulated, *Al-Shūrā* 42:11 *Laysa kamithlihi shay’* ليس كمثله شيء, uses a different root *m-th-l*, “to be like, compare,” *mithl* “similar, image” *tamthīl* “assimilation, likening.” This verse is said to reject “all anthropomorphism.”¹⁹⁷ However, a review of the exegetical history of this verse reveals that in fact this verse, along with its doctrinal cognate *al-Ikhlās* 109: 1-4, were first employed by so-called *anthropomorphists*, not the transcendentalists.¹⁹⁸ It was still in the service of the ‘anthropomorphists’ in Ibn al-Jawzī’s time.¹⁹⁹ This seems quite amazing. What is it about *Laysa kamithlihi shay’* that lent itself to the exegetical needs of reputed anthropomorphists?

The answer to this riddle lies in the grammar of the verse, which could be read in two ways. Syntactically, the *ka* could be read as a syndetic relative cause (*ṣila*) added for emphasis, in which case the reading would be something like, “There (really) is nothing like Him.”²⁰⁰ If the *ka* is taken as a non-expletive, however, it would then read, “There is nothing like (*ka*) His likeness (*mithlihi*).” As Ibn al-Jawzī noted, “taken literally (*ḡāḥir*) these words indicate that God has a *mithl*, which is like nothing and like which there is nothing.”²⁰¹ Ibn al-Jawzī cites this verse as one of the proof-texts of the so-called anthropomorphists. They obviously somehow took the *mithl* here anthropomorphically. But how so? The *mithl* was understood in these circles as a reference to God’s form, *ṣūra*, which term, according to Lane, is a synonym of *mithāl*. Adam was made “according to the *ṣūra* (form/image) of God,” according to certain traditions,²⁰² and He appeared to Muḥammad in an *aḥsan ṣūra* according to other reports.²⁰³ Ibn Ḥanbal identified God’s *aḥsan ṣūra* with Adam’s *aḥsan taqwīm*, in which the latter was created, and both with God’s *ṣūra* according to which Adam was made.²⁰⁴ Adam’s “most beautiful stature” and God’s “most beautiful

¹⁹³ Ibn Abī al ‘Izz, *Sharh al-‘aqida al-Ṭahāwīya* 2 vols. Ed. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin (Beirut, 1408/1987), 1:57 (= *Commentary on the Creed of al-Ṭahāwī by Ibn Abī al-‘Izz*, trns. Muhammad ‘Abdul-Haqq Ansari [Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2000], 23).

¹⁹⁴ Ibn Abī al ‘Izz, *Sharh*, 1:62 (= *Commentary*, 27).

¹⁹⁵ Ibn Abī al ‘Izz, *Sharh*, 1:63 (= *Commentary*, 28).

¹⁹⁶ Ibn Abī al ‘Izz, *Sharh*, 1:93ff (= *Commentary*, 44ff). The definite article used with God’s attributes is probably germane here, e.g. *Al-‘Amīn* (God) vs. *‘amīn* (the Prophet).

¹⁹⁷ Abdoldjavad Falaturi, “How Can a Muslim Experience God, Given Islam’s Radical Monotheism,” in *We Believe In One God: The Experience of God in Christianity and Islam* ed. Annemarie Schimmel and Abdoldjavad Falaturi (New York: Seabury Press), 78.

¹⁹⁸ Van Ess, *TG* 4:378; Gilliot, “Muqatīl,” 57. According to Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Al-Radd ‘ala ‘l-Zanādiqa wa ‘l-Jahmiya* (Cairo, 1393 H), 20 (= “The Refutation of the Zanādiqa and the Jahmiya” trns. Morris Seal, *Muslim Theology* [London: Luzac and Company, 1964, 96] Jahm b. Safwan (d. 746) was the first to use this verse in an anti-anthropomorphist manner.

¹⁹⁹ *Kitāb Akhbār al-Ṣiḡāt*, ed. and trns. by Merlin Swartz in *A Medieval Critique* 29 (Arabic), 148 (English).

²⁰⁰ Ibn Abī al ‘Izz, *Sharh*, 1:122 (= *Commentary*, 64).

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *isti’dhān*, 1.

²⁰³ al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *apud* al-Mubārakfūrī, *Tuḥfa al-aḥwadh bi sharḥ jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī*, 10 vols (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), 9: 106ff.

²⁰⁴ ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad reported (Aḥmad b. Hanbal, *Kitāb al-Sunna*, ed. ‘Abd Allah b. Hasan b. Husayn [Mecca: al-Matba‘at al-Salafiyya, 1349]159): My father reported to me...from ‘Abd al-Rahman b. al-‘A‘ish from some of the companions of the Prophet: “He came out to them one morning while in a joyous mood and a radiant face. We said [to him]: ‘Oh Messenger of God, here you are in

form” are therefore identical, at least for Ibn Ḥanbal. These exegetes might even have solicited the aid of *al-Nahl* 60: *lillāhi l-mathal al-‘ulā*.²⁰⁵ God’s “highest likeness (*al-mathal al-‘ulā*)” here could conceivably be identified with His incomparable *mithl* of 42:11, and then with His anthropoid *ṣūra*.

Others have taken the *ka* as an expletive and read “There is nothing like Him.” Even so, the verse seems to have not been understood in such a way as to preclude an anthropomorphic theology. As van Ess observed, “The statement did not decide the question whether dissimilarity between God and man was absolute or relative...Why should not the intention of the Quranic verse not be satisfied when God is merely considered to be different, perhaps by his dimensions, or by the matter He is composed of, or by the consistency of the matter?”²⁰⁶ Van Ess is not being rhetorical here. Indeed, Islam’s most notorious anthropomorphists, Muqatīl b. Sulaymān (d. 767) and Dāwūd al Jawāribī (d. XXX), said of their flesh and blood deity, “Nothing is like Him nor is He like anything else.”²⁰⁷ How is He different? “*bi-qudra*,” (“in power”) said Muqatīl.²⁰⁸ Or, as Abū Tammām’s “Nābita” believed, *huwa shay’ lā ka-al-ashyā’ min jihat al-qidam* (“He is a being unlike beings in respect of sempiternity.”)²⁰⁹

Understanding this verse to prohibit only absolute likeness, but allow for relative likeness between Creator and creature, allowed one to both disavow *tamthīl/tashbīh* and affirm an anthropoid form for God. The Qur’anic context in fact seems to indicate that a denial of anthropomorphism was not what the verse necessarily intended. “And the blind and the seeing are not alike (*lā yastawī* 35:19).” The verbal root used here, *s-w-y*, denotes “equality, sameness, to be equivalent.” The man who can see (presumably the truth of revelation) is contrasted with the man who cannot. It is certainly not to be inferred that one of the men is embodied while the other is not. The difference, that which constitutes their “unlikeness” or “otherness,” lies elsewhere. Likewise, 33:32 says, “O wives of the Prophet, you are not like (*ka*) any other women.” Whether or not the difference lies in the other women’s lower order of merit, as Goldziher thought, it is clear that there is no polemic here against anthropomorphism.²¹⁰

Harry Wolfson argued that the early, “pre-Mutazilite” Muslims applied the legal principle of analogy (*qiyas*) to this theological argument, allowing partial similarity between man and God while rejecting a complete or total identity.

The explanation that naturally suggested itself to them (the early Muslims) was that the likeness which is implied in the anthropomorphic verses in the Koran is not to be taken to mean a complete likeness in every respect but that the likeness which is explicitly prohibited in the Koran is to be taken to mean a complete likeness in every respect...in their attribution to God these terms are only in some respect like the same terms when attributed to men; in all other respects there is no likeness between them. It is noted, however, that they do not try to explain in what respect they are unlike (*sic*). They are quite satisfied with the simple assertion that the likeness implied is not a likeness in every respect.²¹¹

This tradition of disavowing *tashbīh* while concomitantly affirming for God an anthropoid form seems not to have been confined to the margins of Islam’s theological thought. The evidence suggests that it was the common position among the traditionalists and (proto-) Sunnis. We cite for example the oft-quoted

a joyous mood and a glowing face!” --“How could I not be?” he answered. ‘My Lord came to me last night under the most beautiful form, and He said [to me]: “O Muhammad!...” And my father (Ibn Hanbal) reported to us, ‘Abd al-Razzaq from Ma’mar from Qatada [from the Prophet], “Allah created Adam according to His form.” My father reported to us, ‘Abd al-Razzaq from Ma’mar from Qatada, “in the best stature (*fi ahsani taqwimin*)’ meaning ‘in the most beautiful form (*fi ahsani suratin*).’” Ibrahim b. al-Hajjaj reported to us, Hammad (b. Salama) reported to us...that the Prophet said, “Allah is beautiful (*jamil*) and He loves beauty.”

²⁰⁵ For a discussion of this verse and its relation to 42:11 *v.* Ibn Abī al ‘Izz, *Sharh*, 1:63 (= *Commentary*, 44)

²⁰⁶ Van Ess, “The Youthful God,” 3.

²⁰⁷ Al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. Helmut Ritter (Istanbul, 1929-33), 209.

²⁰⁸ Muqatīl b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 4 vols. Ed. Mahmud Sahata (Cairo: al-Hay’a, 1980-88), 3:465.

²⁰⁹ Wilferd Madelung and Paul Walker, *An Ismaili Heresiography: The “Bāb al-Shayṭān” from Abū Tammām’s Kitāb al-shajara* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 63 (Arabic). Later anthropomorphists interpreted the verse in a similar fashion. Muhammad ibn Sa’dun, better known as Abu Amir al-Qurashi (d.524/1130), famous Andalusian theologian, said: “The heretics cite in evidence the Qur’an verse ‘Nothing is like Him,’ but the meaning of this verse is only that nothing compared to God in His divinity. In form, however, God is like you and me.” Quoted from Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* trans. by Andras and Ruth Hamori (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981) 92. Nor was he alone in this notion. Maimonides, in his *Moreh Nebukim* (w. ca. 1190), makes reference to “people,” presumably Muslims according to Harry A. Wolfson (*Philosophy of the Kalam* [Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976] 102-3) who “came to believe that God has the form (*ṣūrah*) of man, that is to say, man’s figure and shape...maintaining that, if they did not conceive of God as a body possessed of a face and a hand similar to their own figure and shape, they would reduce Him to non-existence. However, He is, in their opinion, the greatest and most splendid (of bodies) and also His matter is not flesh and blood.” *Moreh*, I, I, p. 14, 11.5-II, translated by Wolfson, pp; 102-103.

²¹⁰ Goldziher, *Introduction*, 93.

²¹¹ Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalam*, 14-15.

statement by the traditionalist Nu'aym b. Ḥammād (d. 228/843) from Marv: "Whoever makes *tashbīh* of God to His creation has committed *kufī*. And whoever denies what God has described Himself with has also committed *kufī*. Indeed, all that God has described Himself with, or what His messenger has described Him with, there is no *tashbīh* in it at all."²¹² Now according to al-Suyūṭī Nu'aym was one of the eminent Imāms (*al-a'imma al-a'lām*) of his day and a martyr of the *Mihna*.²¹³ Nu'aym seems to have lost favor with his fellow traditionists though. One source of criticism was his transmission of what is undoubtedly the most unabashedly anthropomorphist report of Umm al-Tufayl wherein God is said to have appeared in Muḥammad in the form of a young man with long hair, green garment and gold sandals. Nu'aym had a reputation of being a "fervent defender" of the "most vigorous form of Sunni doctrine."²¹⁴ It is thus unlikely he applied the Mu'tazilite method of *ta'wīl* to it. In light of this, how does one understand his above declaration that "all that God has described Himself with, or what His messenger has described Him with, there is no *tashbīh* in it at all"? We could probably answer this question by examining a colleague of Nu'aym, the "patron saint of the traditionalists" and architect of early Sunni orthodoxy, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.²¹⁵

We have elsewhere demonstrated that Ibn Ḥanbal quite unequivocally was an anthropomorphist in the strict sense: he was adamant about God's anthropoid form.²¹⁶ To deny it is *kufī*.²¹⁷ The same description of God as a young man with curly hair Ibn Ḥanbal put in his creed: accepting these descriptions literally (*'alā ḡāhirihī*) was incumbent upon all Muslims.²¹⁸ Ibn Ḥanbal was, if you will, "a true blue" anthropomorphist. Yet, he disavowed *tashbīh* in no uncertain terms. When asked about the statements of the Mushabbihā, Ibn Ḥanbal is said to have replied: "He who says 'sight like my sight, hand like my hand, foot like my foot, then he likens God to His creation, and this limits Him, and this is evil speech which I do not like it."²¹⁹ It is also reported that he was asked: "Our Lord is not similar to anything from His creation (and) one does not compare Him to anything from His creation?" to which he replied: "Yes, there is none like Him (*Nā'm. Laysa kamithlihi shay'in*)."²²⁰

According to Ibn Ḥanbal, 42:11 was from among the *mutashābihāt* or ambiguous verses thereby requiring explanation,²²¹ and a proper explanation did not preclude an anthropoid deity. It was, says Ibn Ḥanbal, Jahm b. Safwān (d. 746) who first used this verse in an anti-anthropomorphist manner.²²² But Creator and creature do differ. How so? In a telling remark, Ibn Ḥanbal accuses the Jahmiyya of *tashbīh* for likening God to man by denying that His speech was eternal.

You have, by this assertion, likened Allah to His creatures for, according to your belief, there was a time when He did not speak. So are the sons of men, who could not speak until He created speech for them. This is *kufī* and *tashbīh* together. Far be it from Allah! We say the opposite: Allah was always the speaker when He wished. We do not maintain that He was without speech until He created it; nor do we say that He was without knowledge until He created it; nor do we say that He was without power, light or might until He created them for Himself.²²³

²¹² On Nu'aym b. Ḥammād *v.* Georges Vajda, "Nu'aym b. Ḥammād et Naṣr Allāh Ibn Ṣuqayr," *Arabica* 8:1 (1961):99; *EI*, *s.v.* "Nu'aym b. Ḥammād," by Ch. Pellat, 87.

²¹³ Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-La'ālī al-maṣnū'a fī al-aḥādīth al-mawḍu'a* (Egypt: al-Maktaba al-Tijārīya al-Kubrā, 1962?), 29.

²¹⁴ Pellat, "Nu'aym b. Ḥammād," 87.

²¹⁵ Christopher Melchert correctly observed that: "By and large, Sunni orthodoxy crystallized in the third Islamic century/ninth century CE. At the center of the new orthodoxy lay the traditionalist creed of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and his followers." "Sectaries in the Six Books: Evidence for the Exclusion from the Sunni Community," *The Muslim World* 82 (1992): 287. *V.* also Timan Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology, From Muhammad to the Present*, trns. Thomas Thornton (Princeton, N.J.: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2000), 237: "As far as we can tell from the sources...a clear idea of what orthodoxy was developed mainly among Ahmad ibn Hanbal's students and their students in Baghdad." Note that Sunnism is a 9th century and beyond phenomenon. *V.*

²¹⁶ Wesley Williams, "Aspects of the Creed of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal: A Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic Discourse," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002): 441-463.

²¹⁷ Ibn Hanbal declared, "He who says that Allah created Adam according to the form of Adam (as opposed to God's form), he is a Jahmi (disbeliever)." Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqat*, I:309.

²¹⁸ Ibn Hanbal, 'Aqīda III, *apud* Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqat*, I:246; idem, 'Aqīda V, *apud* Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqat*, I:312

²¹⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar' ta'arud* I:256.

²²⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar' ta'arud* I:256.

²²¹ Ibn Hanbal, *Al-Radd* 20 (= "The Refutation of the Zanādiqa, 98)

²²² To support his doctrine of God as "an invisible spirit." Ibn Hanbal, *Al-Radd 'ala 'l-Zanādiqa wa 'l-Jahmiya* (Cairo, 1393 H), 20 (= "The Refutation of the Zanādiqa and the Jahmiya" trns. Morris Seal, *Muslim Theology* [London: Luzac and Company, 1964], 96.)

²²³ Ibn Hanbal, *Radd*, pp. 36f.

Contrary to God's creatures, which had to wait for Him to create their speech, God was never without this ability. While both God and man speak with a real voice,²²⁴ God had his speech from eternity. Most significant is the accusation against the Jahmiyya of *tashbīh*. The Mu'tazilite Abū 'l-Ḥusain al-Khaiyāṭ, in his ***Kitāb al-intiṣār***, even labeled Jahm b. Ṣafwān "the *imām* of the *mushabbīha*."²²⁵ His sin was apparently that he likened God's knowledge of things to man's by his claim that God knows things only after those things come into existence. There is no way one could translate *tashbīh* here as "anthropomorphist." As Gimaret points out, "that which characterizes the Gahmiyya is fundamentally...their anti-anthropomorphism."²²⁶ Jahm could not tolerate the embodied God of his traditionalist contemporaries.²²⁷

Our final witness hails from 10th century Khurasan, Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Khuzayma (d. 924), the most prominent Shāfi'ī in Nishapur at the time. In his ***Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa-ithbāt ṣifāt al-Rabb***,²²⁸ Ibn Khuzayma, considered "chief of the traditionalists (*ra's al-muḥaddithīn*)", takes up the charge that the traditionalists were "likeners (*mushabbīha*)" because they affirmed the literal meaning of the *Ṣifāt al-Akḥbār*. Discussing their affirmation that God truly has a face (*waḡh*), against the "ignorant Jahmiyya" who claim that God's face in the Qur'an is really His essence (*dhāt*), Ibn Khuzayma writes:

His face is that which He described with splendor (*jalāl*) and venerability (*ikrām*) in His statement, "The face of you Lord remains, possessor of Splendor, Venerability." (God) denied that it perishes (*nafy 'anhu al-halāk*) when His creatures perish. Our Lord is exalted above anything from His essential attributes (*min ṣifāt dhātihī*) perishing...God has affirmed for Himself a Splendid and Venerable face, which He declares is eternal and non-perishable. We and all scholars of our *madhhab* from the Hijaz, the Tihama, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt affirm for God (the) face, which He has affirmed for Himself. We profess it with our tongues and believe it in our hearts, without likening (*ghayr an nashabbīha*) His face to one from His creatures. May our Lord be exalted above our likening Him to His creatures...Listen now, O you who understand what we mentioned regarding the manner of speaking common among the Arabs (*jins al-luḡha al-sā'ira bayn al-'arab*): Do you apply the name *mushabbīha* to the people of narrations and followers of the Sunna? We and all our scholars in all our lands say that the one we worship has a face...And we say that the face of our Lord (radiates) a brilliant, radiant light (*al-nūr wa al-diyā' wa-bahā'*) which, if His veil is removed the glory of His face will scorch everything that sees it. His eyes are veiled from the people of this world who will never see Him during this life...The face of our Lord is eternal ...

Now God has decreed for human faces destruction and denied them splendor and venerability. They are not attributed the light, brilliance or splendor (*al-nūr wa al-diyā' wa-bahā'*) that He described His face with. Eyes in this world may catch human faces without the latter scorching so much as a single hair...Human faces are rooted in time (*muḥdatha*) and created...Every human face perishes...Oh you possessors of reason (*dhawā al-ḥijm*), could it every really occur to any one with sense and who knows Arabic and knows what *tashbīh* (means) that this (transient and dull human) face is like that (splendidly brilliant face of God)?²²⁹

Ibn Khuzayma here adamantly argues for God's possession of a true face, but one dangerously radiant and non-perishable, in contrast to man's perishable and dull face. He asks, in short, 'Can one who acknowledges these differences be charged with *tashbīh*?' Certainly not according to the language of the Arabs! We have again both the affirmation of anthropomorphism and this disavow of *tashbīh*. Like the peoples of the Books before them, Islam's was a transcendent anthropomorphism. God has a transcendent anthropoid form that differed significantly from man's, just as we discovered with the God of Israel.

²²⁴ 'Abd Allah b. Aḥmad said: "I asked my father about a people who say: 'When Allah spoke to Musa he didn't speak with a voice.' And my father said: 'Rather, your Lord indeed spoke with a voice. These *ḥadīth* we report them as they came.'" He says also: "My father said (from Ibn Mas'ūd): 'When Allah spoke a voice is heard like the dragging of iron chains on stones.' My father said: 'This the Jahmiyya deny.'" 'Abd Allah b. Aḥmad, ***Kitāb al-Sunna*** I:280 #533, #534.

²²⁵ ***Le Livre du triomphe***, ed. H. S. Nyberg (Cairo 1925) 133.

²²⁶ Gimaret, ***Dieu à l'image*** 28.

²²⁷ Wilfred Madelung ("The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran" in his ***Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*** [London: Variorum Reprints, 1985], V:505f) noted that the Jahmiyya assertion of a created Qur'an "constituted an attack on the anthropomorphic...God of traditionalist Sunnism" and "the insistence of the traditionalists that God truly speaks is part of their general defense of an anthropomorphic and personal concept of God."

²²⁸ ed. by Muḥammad Khalīl Harrās (Cairo: 1968).

²²⁹ Ibid., 10f, 22f.

